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ALLEGIANCES

FrostClan

Leader: Pebblestar - Light cream she-cat with brown spots, a scar on her mouth, spots on her back, and green eyes
(Mate: Unknown tom//Kit: Leafkit)

Deputy: Skunktail - Dark gray she-cat with a white belly and blue eyes

Medicine cat: Molestripe - Furless tom with a gray stripe on his back and brown eyes
(Apprentice: Robinpaw)

Warriors:
Swiftstrike - White tabby tom with a scar on his flank and gray eyes
(Apprentice: Quailpaw)

Sandclaw - Pale yellow tom with brown stripes, sharp claws, and dull blue eyes
(Apprentice: Nightpaw//Mate: Stormrunner//Kits: Nightpaw and Morningkit)

Featherstep - Light brown she-cat with white patches
(Apprentice: Owlpaw//Mate: Snowbreeze//Kits: Doehoof and Misypelt)

Littlefoot - Small, dark ginger tortoiseshell tom with blue eyes
(Mate: Mistypelt//Kit: Silverkit)

Doehoof - Gray tall she-cat with white spots, black tipped paws, and yellow eyes

Runningspirit - Brown tabby tom with a light brown tuft and green eyes
(Mate: Foxtuft//Kit: Blazekit)

Snowbreeze - White tabby tom with a gray tuft and green eyes
(Mate: Featherstep//Kits: Doehoof and Mistypelt)

Apprentices:
Quailpaw - Dull brown skinny tom with brown stripes and greenish-blue eyes

Nightpaw - Blue gray she-cat with a black stripe running along her back and bright amber eyes

Robinpaw - Black tom with a gray belly, a torn ear, long claws, and ice blue eyes

Owlpaw - Dark ginger tom with brown ears and dull amber eyes

Queens:
Foxtuft - Beautiful red she-cat with a brown tuft and lively green eyes, mother of Blazekit, foster mother of Sheepkit and Leafkit
(Mate: Runningspirit//Other kit: Owlpaw)

Stormrunner - Black, short, thick furred she-cat with blue eyes, mother of Morningkit
(Mate: Sandclaw//Other kit: Nightpaw)

Mistypelt - Gray she-cat with orange eyes, mother of Silverkit
(Mate: Littlefoot)

Elders:
Breezeheart - Black she-cat with one green eye and one blue eye
(Mate: Sundapple//Kit: Stormrunner)

Torrentflow - Blue gray tabby tom with green eyes

SparkClan

Leader: Needlestar - Dark gray tabby tom with a missing eye, a black tuft, and amber eyes
(Apprentice: Hawkpaw)

Deputy: Hailfall - White tom with gray spots, gray tipped paws, and green eyes
(Mate: Half-face//Kit: Stormpaw)

Medicine cats:
Mud-dapple - Brown tom with dark brown dapples and gray eyes

Stoneheart - Black tabby she-cat with a missing eye, and amber eyes

Oakpelt - Dark red tom with ragged fur and green eyes
(Apprentice: Poppypaw)

Warriors:
Lightningrush - Yellow lithe tom with jagged black spots, a black tipped tail, and green eyes
(Apprentices: Deerpaw and Stormpaw//Mate: Mossfur//Kits: Harekit and Dawnkit)

Half-face - She-cat with half yellow and half red fur with one right blue eye and one left amber eye
(Mate: Hailfall//Kit: Stormpaw)

Flintspark - White she-cat with orange patches, an orange tuft, and blue eyes

Twigsnap - Dark brown frail tom with a torn ear and blue eyes
(Mate: Rosethorn)

Rosethorn - Reddish gray she-cat with a dark red stripe along her back and amber eyes
(Mate: Twigsnap)

Moonshine - Blue gray tom with fur full of battle scars and green eyes
(Mate: Dewleaf//Kit: Deerpaw)

Pikeclaw - Dark ginger tom with with sharp claws and green eyes
(Mate: Falconeye//Kits: Branchkit and Poppypaw)

Apprentices:
Poppypaw - Orange she-cat a white belly and bright blue eyes

Deerpaw - Gray tabby tom with black tipped paws and amber eyes

Stormpaw - White tom with gray spots and green eyes

Hawkpaw - Dark brown she-cat with white tuft and orange eyes

Queens:
Mossfur - Green she-cat (result of being colored by twolegs) with amber eyes, mother of Harekit and Dawnkit
(Mate: Lightningrush)

Falconeye - Light brown she-cat with a scarred eye and gray eyes, mother of Branchkit
(Mate: Pikeclaw//Other kit: Poppypaw)

Elders:
Bubblepool - Gray she-cat with blueish white spots and blue eyes
(Mate: Nightsky//Kits: Moonshine and Needlestar)

Nightsky - Blind black tabby tom with amber eyes
(Mate: Bubblepool//Kits: Moonshine and Needlestar)

WillowClan

Leader: Vinestar - Dark ginger she-cat with brown stripes resembling vines and green eyes

Deputy: Crow-wing - Black tom with battle scars, a wing shaped mark on his back, and green eyes

Medicine cat: Sunbright - Yellow old she-cat with a white belly and dull eyes

Warriors:
Mud-dapple - Brown tom with black spots, a scar on his flank, and

blue eyes
(Apprentice: Rubblepaw//Mate: Foxtail//Kit: Hillpaw)

Mistysight - Gray tom with blurry, gray eyes
(Apprentice: Hillpaw//Mate: Snowtrail)

Snowtrail - Albino she-cat with pink eyes and a missing ear
(Mate: Mistysight)

Redfoot - Dark ginger tortoiseshell tom with red tipped paws and amber eyes

Foxtail - Pale ginger she-cat with a red tail and brown eyes

Blackface - White tom with a black spot on his face, a scar on his shoulder, and gray eyes

Batflight - Black she cat with long fangs and amber eyes

Apprentices:
Hillpaw - Pale brown tom with an odd bump on his back, a black spot on his back, and green eyes

Rubblepaw - Blackshe-cat with white spots, white tipped paws, a scar across her face, and blue eyes

Queen: Stonepool - Gray thick-furred she-cat with blue eyes, mother of Softkit, Harekit, and Eaglekit
(Mate: Mud-dapple)

Elder: Heronflight - Deaf brindle tom with battle scars and amber eyes

GustClan

Leader: Pearlstar - White she-cat with a silver stripe along her back and green eyes
(Apprentice: Redpaw)

Deputy: Breezestep - Thin yellow tabby tom with orange eyes
(Mate: Cougarfang//Kits: Adderbite and Mudstripe)

Medicine cat: Fishleap - Deaf gray calico tom with a scar on his left eye and amber eyes
(Apprentice: Fernpaw)

Warriors:
Cougarfang - Dull brown she-cat with a missing ear, tail, and blue eyes
(Mate: Breezestep//Kits: Adderbite and Mudstripe)

Figseed - Tall dark ginger tom with brown spots and green eyes
(Mate: Brindlefur//Kits: Redpaw, Piperkit, and Mistykit)

Adderbite - Yellow tabby tom with blue eyes

Mudstripe - Brown tom with amber eyes
(Mate: Littlefoot//Kit: Fernpaw)

Sootpelt - Black tom with a white tipped tail and amber eyes
(Mate: Swanflight)

Littlefoot - Tiny white she-cat with gray tipped paws and blue eyes
(Mate: Mudstripe//Kit: Fernpaw)

Swanflight - White she-cat with green eyes
(Mate: Sootpelt)

Apprentices:
Redpaw - Yellow she-cat with a red face and green eyes

Fernpaw - Brown tortoiseshell with blue eyes

Queen: Brindlefur - Beautiful brindle she-cat with green eyes, mother of Piperkit and Mistykit
(Mate: Figseed//Other kit: Redpaw)

Elder: Graymist - Gray she-cat with white tipped paws and blue eyes
(Mate: Whiteheart//Kits: Silverstar, Swanflight, and Littlefoot)

Outside the Clans

Loner: Bootsie - Lightgray tabby tom with a purple collar, thick fur, battle scars, and orange eyes

LightClan resident: Patchstar - Brown and red tortoiseshell tom with green eyes

A/N: Not all the characters listed here will appear in this book. However, they may appear in future books

The Territory

FrostClan is located on flat land, the nearest to the "Stream Of Leaping Fish." It is filled with some willow trees.

SparkClan resides on rocky terrain near mountains which used to be active volcanoes.

WillowClan lives on the densest part of the forest, filled with an abundant amount of willow and oak trees.

GustClan is located on a mountain near SparkClan with strong blowing winds and a few pine trees.

The Clans hold the gathering at a large clearing which has four rocks and a large oak tree in the middle. They call this place "Tall Oak." The leaders would sit on top of the rocks with their deputy beside them at a lower level.

The Clans

Cats meet LightClan at an underground cave which can only be entered through steep holes with twists and turns. Legends say that only cats that are granted access by LightClan can pass through these holes with safety. In the cave, there is a stream of water which glows like moonlight. It is called "The Light Stream." Cats who wish to speak with LightClan must drink must drink the water from the stream. After that is done, they will fall asleep and have dreams with their LightClan ancestors.

FrostClan – FrostClan cats are expert diggers. They dig hunting tunnels in the ground, commonly during leaf-bare, when prey is scarce on the surface. This makes FrostClan the most well-fed Clan

in the forest. When an apprentice is turned into a warrior or medicine cat, they need to swim in the Stream Of Leaping Fish for a period of time. FrostClan believes that by doing this, LightClan will accept the apprentice's journey to a new stage of life.

SparkClan – SparkClan cats are excellent climbers. Their territory is located next to a mountain on top of a steep cliff. They have to climb up rocky terrain so they taught themselves how to scale up the cliff easily. Since they live next to what used to be an active volcano, they sometimes disguise their scent with leftover ash to surprise their enemies. This Clan is also great at stalking as a result. Their territory is the closest to LightClan's entrance.

GustClan – GustClan cats are swift and agile runners. They developed their speed because of the location of their territory which is on top of a mountain. They enjoy the strong winds that blow onto their mountain every day. Birds often fly past their mountain. Some pose threat to the Clan, such as hawks, while others are great sources of food, such as doves. Using their agility, they can easily dodge or chase these birds. A common game they like to play is racing down and up their mountain.

WillowClan – WillowClan cats can jump great heights. Their territory is in the middle of a dense forest which contains tall, towering trees. They have dens located on the branches of a tree they call "Great Willow". These dens are located based on the cat's position. The nursery is at the bottom, the apprentices' den is at a lower branch, the warriors' and medicine den are at a middle branch, and the leader's den is at the very top. Great Willow is sturdy enough to support the whole Clan since it is over a hundred years old.

Clan Terms

Tom – Male cat.

She-cat – Female cat.

Leader – A cat who leads the Clan.

Deputy – Second in command to the leader. When the current

leader dies, the deputy replaces them.

Warrior – Cat with the responsibilities of hunting, fighting, going on patrols, and other Clan-related activities.

Medicine cat – Cat with the responsibility of healing injured or sick cats. They often communicate with LightClan.

Queen – Cat, usually a she-cat, who nurses kits in the nursery.

Mentor – Cat who trains an apprentice.

Apprentice – Cat who trains to be either a warrior or medicine cat. They train under a mentor. Their name receives the suffix "paw". After they become a warrior or medicine cat, they earn a unique suffix.

Kit – Kittens under the age of 6 moons. After 6 moons, they become an apprentice. Their name receives the suffix "kit".

Kittypet - A cat who lives with their twolegs.

Loner - A cat who is outside the Clans.

Rogue - A cat who was formerly a part of a Clan.

Twoleg – Human.

High rock – Meeting point of warriors in a Clan. This is where Clan meetings are held.

Gathering – A special meeting held every full moon where cats of all Clans share news.

Leaf-bare – Winter.

Leaf-fall – Autumn.

Greenleaf – Summer.

Newleaf – Spring.

Sun-rise – Morning.

Sun-high – Noon.

Sun-fall – Afternoon/sunset.

Moon-rise – Moon rise.

Moon-high – Midnight.

Moon-fall – Transition from night to day.

Patrol – A group of cats tasked to do things to serve the Clan. A patrol is organized by the deputy. The most common types of patrols are hunting patrols (for getting fresh-kill) and border patrols (for protecting or scanning the territory). Sometimes, patrols can also serve different purposes, such as search patrols (for searching a missing cat).

A/N: Whoooo just added some important world building info!! I really enjoyed writing the last part

Prologue

A crisp breeze blew in the air, shaking the remaining leaves on the trees. A black tom and another tom with cherry red fur were walking through the quiet night. The trail they walked through was covered with dry leaves, making every step they took crackle in the silence.

The black tom stopped momentarily, then panted, "Ugh, are we there yet? My paws are sore!"

"It's only a few tail-lengths left, Grouchypaw," the red one replied. "Maybe we could arrive faster if you quit complaining."

"Stop calling me that. I have a name and it's Robinpaw. Plus, that's what you said the last time! I can't believe I trusted you to bring me to this 'secret herb place', Owlpaw. The worst part is that we might get caught trying to sneak out!"

Owlpaw turned to face Robinpaw with a huge smirk. "You wanted herbs, so I am taking you to the best place to find them. Besides, everyone has probably worked their heads off during that fight with SparkClan earlier! So relax, take a deep breath, and keep walking."

Robinpaw scoffed at his companion's words. "You always think you're right."

They kept following the leaf covered trail. Robinpaw's eyes scanned the dark areas. He flinched as soon as he spotted a dark figure lurking in the shadows. His eyes shot open and a chill ran through his spine.

"D-did you see that?" Robinpaw asked as his body froze.

"What do you mean? I don't see anything. You must be imagining things."

Robinpaw's body trembled terribly as he continued to walk through the trail. He had always been jumpy since he was a kit, freaking out whenever he heard a twig snapping or the howl of the wind. This was no difference, and it definitely gave him a good startle.

In the silence that was filled with hooting owls, footsteps crackled in the distance. Robinpaw's fur stood on its end and his body turned stiff.

"Ahh!" he cried in panic. "I think someone's following us! We should go back."

Owlpaw laughed at the sight of the medicine cat apprentice freaking out. "You scaredy cat, it's probably a squirrel. No one's following us. And guess what?"

"What?"

"We're here! Are you happy-"

A lithe tabby leaped onto Robinpaw and sunk its claws into his fur. It slashed his ear and blood trailed out. Robinpaw let out a wail of pain.

He clawed at the tabby's flank. It yowled loudly and tossed him away. His body laid limp on the ground. Owlpaw started tackling the tabby from behind. With one big leap, he bit the rascal on its neck.

"Get lost, furball!" he yelled. However, the tabby's movement was lightning fast. It pushed away Owlpaw effortlessly.

The tabby headed for Robinpaw, running towards him with full speed. He struggled to get up, but managed to escape after Owlpaw helped.

The two toms decided to return to the FrostClan camp. Their hearts pounded so hard that they swore they could hear it beating. They ran as fast as a mouse who was being chased by a snake, never thinking to rest for a bit.

They stopped once they were near camp. Robinpaw sighed in relief

as he felt his knees tremble. "This is why I shouldn't have asked you to help me, you almost got us killed!"

Owlpaw rolled his eyes. "I didn't put ourselves in danger. That darn tabby did." Robinpaw didn't want to respond. Talking to Owlpaw feels like having a conversation with a crow sometimes.

Robinpaw looked around to see if the tabby had followed them. He saw no sign of it, but instead he spotted a brown and red tortoiseshell. His fur was shimmering and his eyes resembled glowing orbs, unlike any living cat. Contrasting his graceful appearance, he wore an impatient grimace.

"Greetings, young one," it said. "It has been some time since we last met."

Robinpaw looked irritated. "Patchstar, I don't have time now! I literally almost died and now my lungs feel like they're going to collapse at any moment. Can we talk later once I get back to the camp?"

Patchstar hissed at the young black tom. He replied, "This is an urgent matter. LightClan has delivered me a prophecy and they sent me here to inform you about it. FrostClan will face a dangerous threat and-"

"What are you talking about, Patchstar? FrostClan is fine! We don't need vague prophecies that will fulfill itself in the end. We have enough prey, enough territory, and an abundant amount of warriors."

"That's what you think. Attacks have been plaguing our Clan for moons, killing off many of our Clanmates. No one knows who the culprit is and they could strike again at any moment. Are you sure we're safe?" Patchstar's voice was laced with irritation. "Now, listen closely, young one..."

Owlpaw turned his head around to face Robinpaw. He was confused because the tom seemed to be talking to himself - or that's what he thought.

"Robinpaw? Who are you talking to?" he asked. Robinpaw didn't answer. "Robinpaw? Hello?"

Robinpaw suddenly shook his whole body and rushed to FrostClan's camp.

"Owlpaw, we need to get back now!" he cried.

The red tom followed after him, confused. "What has gotten into you, you silly crow?"

"LightClan has given me a prophecy!"

A/N: Oops sorry for the rushed scenes aksakjskjkjkd

Feel free to give me any writing critique or advice in the comments

Chapter 1

An orange she-kit with brown and white patches stood still in a patch of tall grass. A soft breeze filled the air, swaying the grass back and forth. She took slow, gentle steps with her tiny paws as she felt the dirt underneath her as she tried her best to not make a sound. She was hunting a mouse.

The mouse was eating a piece of corn, standing still between the grass. It's an easy target for any cat. She inched closer and closer. The mouse looked back, but it was too late. The kit took a big leap. She tackled the rodent that squirmed in her paws.

'Yes, I finally did it,' she thought with pride.

"Roar!" a gray she-kit mewed. "Haha! Caught you again, Leafkit!" She knocked over Leafkit, bumping into her side as if she were an enemy warrior.

The mouse escaped Leafkit's grip. "Fox dung! Silverkit, I almost caught it..."

Silverkit looked confused at first, then chuckled. "Hey, watch your language! You aren't catching prey again, right? C'mon, look at this cool place I found!"

She dashed across a pebble covered trail, leading to what looked like narrow cave. Leafkit followed close behind. Although she often tripped on the tiny stones, she managed to catch up. She peeked into the so-called "cool place" that Silverkit mentioned. Through the mossy entrance, she could see glimmering rocks. The sound of a trickling river filled her ears, but she had no idea where it came from.

"I think there's a secret entrance around here. I heard the apprentices talking about a cave with a pretty river," Silverkit explained.

"How are we supposed to get there, wise ol' Silverkit?"

"Geez, I'm not that old! I'm 5 moons only, practically the same as you!" Silverkit fumed. Leafkit laughed hysterically, almost falling to the floor. "As I was saying, I found a rock blocking a possible entryway, but it's too heavy for me to push. That's why I need your help!"

She scampered to a rock with Leafkit who was trailing behind her. The two kits used all their strength to push it away. Soon enough, they managed to thrust it, uncovering a hole in the cave. As the dust rested on the ground, Leafkit admired the dazzling sight. A bundle of shiny pebbles lit up the cave, accompanying a small stream which burbled near the shore. There was a hole at the top of the cave, almost perfectly in the middle of the ceiling. Light shimmered through the cracks. Leafkit couldn't help but stare at the sight with awe.

"I bet you can't catch me!" Silverkit challenged. She leaped onto a high ledge, puffing up her chest mockingly. Leafkit ran up and tackled her. The two kits tussled, pretending they were two warriors in battle.

"Have you found them yet?" a cat called out from outside the cave.

Another cat answered, "Not yet! Their scent is getting stronger, though!" The frantic sound of pawsteps came closer and closer. Leafkit anxiously waited for what would happen next. 'Oh no! What if someone find us?' she thought.

"This hole wasn't here before," a cat commented, pointing at the entrance Leafkit and SIlverkit used. "Maybe they went through here!"

The group of cats dug through the hole so that they could fit. Once they managed to get in, they continued to search.

"Ah! Who are you?" Leafkit shrieked, her fur standing on its end.

A large spotted cat with cream fur stepped forward with a stern look in her face. She scolded, "It's just us FrostClan cats. Why were

you off on your own with Silverkit? You could've gotten hurt! You know that kits aren't allowed to play outside of camp."

"Sorry, Pebblestar," Leafkit mewed apologetically, facing the ground. "It won't happen again, I promise!"

Pebblestar simply sighed and carried Leafkit, holding onto her scruff. Another cat carried Silverkit as well. The group of cats returned to camp.

"It's not fair!" Leafkit complained, lying on the ground. "I just wanted to have some fun outside for once! I don't want to be stuck in the nursery."

Silverkit reassured her friend, "Don't feel too bad about it. We'll only need one more moon until our apprentice ceremony! Once we're six moons old, we can go and explore whenever we want!"

"I know... it's just taking so long."

"Stop moping around about that. Oh yeah, have you heard about FrostClan's newest kit?" Leafkit's face instantly lit up with curiosity. "I heard its name is Sheepkit. I think it's a she-cat!"

Leafkit chuckled, "A she-cat? You thought Torrentflow was a she-cat too even though he's a tom! I think Sheepkit is a tom."

"Nah, sheep sounds like a she-cat name. C'mon, I wanna see her now! Hurry!" Leafkit simply rolled her eyes in response.

They finally arrived at the nursery, excited to see the clan's newest arrival. Foxtuft, one of the queens, was seen feeding a fluffy, white kit. 'That must be Sheepkit!' Leafkit thought.

"Hey there, ya' two! What brings ya' here?" Foxtuft greeted them.

Leafkit replied, "We wanna see Sheepkit!"

Foxtuft gave a warm smile. "Ah, he's being fed at the moment. He certainly is a fiesty lil' one!"

"How many moons old is she?" Silverkit asked.

Foxtuft laughed, "Oh, honey, Sheepkit is a tom, not a she-cat! He's just three moons old by the way."

"Told you," Leafkit whispered. Silverkit groaned as Leafkit chuckled.

As she finished speaking, a tom entered the nursery - it was Swiftstrike, a senior warrior. The sleek tabby glared at Leafkit coldly as he walked in, muttering something under his breath.

'Look at that scar on his flank,' Leafkit wondered with amazement when she spotted a scar on Swiftstrike's striped pelt. 'Do all warriors get nasty scars like those? I wonder if I'll get one too.'

Swiftstrike turned his head towards Foxtuft and spotted her new kit. "Ah, a new kit, Foxtuft?" he asked.

"Yeah! This lil' guy here's Sheepkit. How are yer' wounds, Swiftstrike?"

"Don't worry, it's just a couple of claw marks. I've been through worse."

Swiftstrike inspected Sheepkit closely. He continued, "FrostClan is lucky to have a new kit, after all we lost many warriors during the battle yesterday. But he doesn't resemble you or your mate. Is he your own kit?"

"Oh, no. He's a kittypet that got lost, so I brought him back-"

"Wait, a kittypet?" Swiftstrike scrunched his face up.

"Yeah, he's a kittypet. Ya' got a problem with that?" Foxtuft asked with a hint of anger, moving her tail to Sheepkit's side.

"Why did you take him in?" Swiftstrike's tone was bitter.

Foxtuft wore a sour expression. She closed Sheepkit's ears, then

exclaimed, "Of course I took him in! He was alone and could've be in grave danger. Pebblestar doesn't mind it anyway, why are ya' so riled up?"

"That's no excuse. Just because he needed help doesn't mean that he could just join our Clan," Swiftstrike growled. "FrostClan is a Clan, not a haven for loners or kittypets where they can come and stay as they please. You should know better than that, Foxtuft."

Foxtuft grew furious. "Silverkit, Leafkit, I think it's better if ya' go outside," she warned the two kits.

A/N: Swiftstrike is racist and he sucks bye

Chapter 2

Sounds of Foxtuft and Swiftstrike arguing could still be heard from outside. It made Leafkit and Silverkit nervous.

"Why was Swiftstrike so grumpy about outsiders joining us? Haven't we done that since moons ago?" Leafkit asked.

Silverkit shrugged. "I don't know. I always thought outsiders were welcome here, but lately I've heard more and more warriors talking about how much they hate that. Eh, maybe someone ruffled his tail this morning. Anyways, wanna chase butterflies with me?"

"Uh... I think I'm gonna practice hunting."

"Again? Oh come on!" Silverkit complained. Leafkit laughed at the sight of her best friend being annoyed.

"I'm just joking! I'm going to explore camp for a while."

"Well, see you later then."

———

Leafkit walked towards the high rock. Pebblestar would usually sit there to make announcements or to watch the clan throughout the day. Leafkit gazed upon it, her eyes widened. 'It's so tall,' she thought. A ray of sunlight shined on the stone, making it glisten. She envisioned herself standing proudly on top of the rock, leading the Clan into battle. She couldn't help but imagine how fun it would be. Leafkit tried to bound up the large stone, however it was too big for her to climb. She decided to go to the medicine den instead.

On the way, many cats greeted her.

"Hello, Leafkit!"

"Leafkit, aren't you far from the nursery?"

"Hey, Leafkit, what are you up to?"

She simply smiled at the cats, confused on what to respond with.

Even in her earliest memories, she had always been greeted by the Clan wherever she went all because she was Pebblestar's daughter. Although she found it flattering, it easily overwhelmed her, especially for a kit at her age. 'Why can't these cats treat me normally? I'm just like them after all,' she told herself.

Once she arrived at the medicine den, her tiny paws were too exhausted to walk anymore. She caught the noise of cats were talking inside, so she decided to see what was going on.

She took a peek and saw three cats; a black one, one with no fur, and a cream colored cat. 'That must be Robinpaw, Molestripe, and Pebblestar!' she thought.

The three cats seemed to be in the middle of an important discussion, so Leafkit decided to wait until they were finished. Her tail swayed anxiously when she saw concerned looks on the their faces. 'What are they talking about?'

"Patchstar delivered you a prophecy?" Pebblestar asked. A pang of sadness was seen in the leader's eyes. It was subtle, but noticeable if you looked hard enough.

Robinpaw lowered his head. He answered, "Yes. He said that the prophecy is vital for FrostClan if we want to survive."

"I see. What does it say?"

He recollected what Patchstar had said to him. "The last leaf on the tree will save the snow from melting."

"Do you know what it means?"

Robinpaw shook his head. Molestripe stepped forward and said, "FrostClan's only hope for survival is the leaf that was mentioned. I'm not sure what it refers to, but it must be an important cat."

"So, we need to find out who this leaf is?" Pebblestar questioned the

medicine cat.

Molestripe shook his head. "Not necessarily. Just like any prophecy from LightClan, this one will probably fulfill itself. But it's a good idea to make some precautions in case anything bad happens."

Leafkit kept watching the cats during their conversation. 'Is it really true? How can a leaf save an entire Clan?' Leafkit thought.

"What'cha looking at?" a cat said out of nowhere.

Leafkit got startled, "W-who's there?!" She whipped her head to look behind her. It turned out to be a yellow tom with orange patches.

"Oh, it's just you, Morningkit. Don't startle me like that! I swear my fur nearly fell off my body."

"Oh, sorry. At least you're glad you didn't end up like Molestripe!" Morningkit chuckled. "Oh my gosh oh my gosh oh my gosh! Have you heard?"

"Heard what?"

Morningkit wore a huge smile on his face. "Tomorrow is my apprentice ceremony! I've been waiting for this my whole life!"

"Congrats! Who do you want to be your mentor?"

Morningkit thought for a moment. "Hmm... Definitely not Littlefoot. He'll be too scared to even try to talk to me! Maybe, uh, Swiftstrike?"

Leafkit got confused. "Swiftstrike?" she asked, remembering his attitude earlier in the morning. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. Quailpaw once told me that Swiftstrike fought off three cats by himself during an invasion! Isn't he just the coolest warrior ever? Other than him, I'd probably pick Featherstep. She's really good at hunting so I want to learn her tricks! Oh, I gotta head back. I need to prepare for my ceremony."

Leafkit simply smiled at him and continued listening to Pebblestar,

Molestripe, and Robinpaw's conversation.

"Thank you for informing me about this, Robinpaw. I am also thankful for your help too Molestripe. I hope that LightClan will show us the path to fulfill the prophecy. I'll ask Skunktail to organize more border patrols. Now, you may continue with your duties," Pebblestar said.

Robinpaw and Molestripe bowed in respect. They watched as their leader walked out of the medicine den. 'A prophecy?' Leafkit thought. 'Could there really be a cat who's going to save all of FrostClan?'

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She finally arrived at the nursery where she saw Silverkit, Morningkit, Sheepkit, Blazekit, and their mothers. They were all curled up in their moss beds except Morningkit and Silverkit who were playing with a moss ball together.

"Finally, yer' back. Where have ya' been off to?" Foxtuft asked, licking the top of Leafkit's head.

"Uh... traveling around camp?"

"You lil' troublemaker, hope you aren't stirrin' up any problems! That incident this morning should be enough fun for ya'!"

"Hey, I wasn't! Can I play with Silverkit and Morningkit now?" Foxtuft nodded with a smile. Leafkit played with the other two kits, rolling around and causing a racket.

"Can you two keep it down? Some of us are trying to sleep!" Blazekit warned, her face looking furious.

"The moon has barely risen, Blazekit," Silverkit answered. "Just put some moss in your ears and maybe your ego will lessen as well!" Blazekit groaned at Silverkit's sarcastic remark.

The kits roared with laughter. Foxtuft couldn't help but chuckle too. "Do y'all wanna hear a story?" she offered. Leafkit, Morningkit, and Silverkit immediately gathered around Foxtuft, ready to listen.

"Long ago, there weren't any Clans. There were cats in the forest, sure, but they all lived completely scattered. They were practically savages. With no rules, no order, and no Clans, they were always fighting and stealing and attacking each other!

"LightClan saw this and became really mad so they punished these cats for their actions."

"Punish? LIke what?" Morningpaw asked.

"Well, it's best if ya' hear about that part when yer' older. It's really, er, violent and it might give ya' nightmares.

"LightClan's punishment was so heavy that only a few survived. These survivors formed the Clans as we know 'em today - FrostClan, SparkClan, WillowClan, and GustClan."

"Why four Clans? Why can't the cats live together as one like they did?" Leafpaw wondered.

"Oh my, y'all are full of curiosity aren't ya'? Do ya' wanna hear the story or keep on askin' questions?" Foxtuft scolded playfully.

"Uh... nevermind then! Please continue!"

"Now where was I? Oh, right. The Clans still weren't perfect since they barely got along. Everyday, it seemed like a new fight would break out between 'em over something small like a piece of prey.

"In an effort to stop it, the leaders of all four Clans formed the Warrior Code. The Warrior Code still guides us 'till this day. It gives us laws to avoid conflict and problems within the Clans.

"Well, that's enough stories for today! Y'all should be sleepin' by now!"

Silverkit whined, "Aw... do we have to sleep now? Leafkit, Leafkit, let's play warrior and intruder!"

Leafkit let out a yawn. "I don't know about you, but I'm tired. All that time I spent outside must've drained out my energy."

"Really? Fine. I guess I'll sleep too. Good night then."

"Good night, Silverkit!" Leafkit's eyes slowly closed as a gentle cold breeze blew. Soon, sleep overtook her senses.

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Leafkit woke up in a sudden, nothing but darkness surrounding her.

"Hello?" she called. "Is anyone there?"

Chilly winds started blowing in her direction, ruffling her fur gently. A glowing figure appeared shortly after the winds stopped blowing. It was a tortoiseshell tom who had sparkling fur, unlike any living cat. His bright green gaze met with Leafkit.

"Hello, daughter," he greeted. He wore a welcoming smile.

Leafkit was startled. "W-who are you?! And I'm not your daughter! Or uh... as far as I know."

"You will learn in time. The answer to that question is not why I am here. Follow me."

He lead Leafkit to a gorge. A fast flowing river gurgled at the sides, accompanied with the occasional sight of fish swimming along. Leaves slowly fell from the trees, lacing the ground with them.

"Everything in life has its purpose, Leafkit," he whispered. "Some not as obvious as it seems, however just as important. For example, the water, although lifeless, gives the fish a place to live and thrive."

"Do I have a purpose too?"

The tom nodded. He continued, "Despite that, some things are simply parasites - something that exploits others and gives nothing in return. The world is full of them, Leafkit, and it is your task to help remove them. Otherwise, the Clans wouldn't last very long."

Suddenly, she heard slow paw steps walking towards her. Her fur stood on its end as the tom faded away. In a flash, something gray

hit her. Leafkit's eyes shot open only to realize she had been dreaming. The gray creature that attacked her turned out to be Silverkit who was actually just pouncing on her.

"Gotcha, Leafkit!" she exclaimed. "Quit meowing in your sleep and get up already. Morningkit's apprentice ceremony is starting. Are you coming or are you gonna fake-hunt again?"

Leafkit grumbled, "I'm coming, Silverkit. Just give me a few moments, I'm still sleepy."

Silverkit walked out of the nursery to play with Sheepkit. Leafkit pondered on what the dream meant. Who was that mysterious tom? Was that really her father? Was the dream an omen? These questions echoed in her mind as she tried to answer them.

A/N: whooo done rewriting this chapter

Chapter 3

'Ugh, it's rising-sun already?' Leafkit thought. Her eyes scanned around the nursery and she spotted Blazekit who was still asleep. Next to them was Foxtuft who was sharing a mouse with Stormrunner.

"Already awake, youngster?" whispered Foxtuft.

Leafkit let out a huge yawn. "Yeah, but I'm still kind of sleepy."

"Oh, yer' friends are outside near the high rock. They're gonna watch Morningkit's apprentice ceremony. Ya' should come too!"

Stormrunner added, "He looks really excited. I can't believe my little kit is already an apprentice! It feels as if he was born yesterday. Are you gonna watch his ceremony?"

Leafkit thought for a moment. "Since I don't have anything else to do, I think I will!"

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Leafkit padded quickly to the high rock. 'The ceremony might start soon, I gotta hurry!' Her tiny paws moved fast as they could bring her.

"Slow down, Leafkit!" Stormrunner yelled. "Wow, you're fast for a little kit."

"I'm not a little kit, I'm five moons old," Leafkit muttered.

They finally arrived at the high rock. Pebblestar was standing on top of it. Her large body casted a shadow on the cats below. 'She looks so magnificent!' Leafkit thought. 'I wanna be like her one day.'

Leafkit spotted Silverkit and Morningkit near the high rock. They were in the middle of an fun conversation.

"Ahh! I'm so excited! I'm so excited! I'm so excited! After all this waiting, I'm finally an apprentice! It feels like a dream!" Morningkit squealed.

"Oh wait, today is a dream. Sorry, Morningkit! Time to wake up, I guess," Silverkit teasingly replied.

Morningkit scoffed. "You're no fun. Wait, is that... it's Leafkit and my mom! Hi!"

"Hello, my sweet little ray of sunshine!" Stormrunner told Morningkit. "My little kit is all grown up. I'm so proud of you!"

Morningkit grinned from ear to ear. "I'm can't believe I'm going to be an apprentice, mom!"

Stormrunner smiled and put her head under Morningkit's muzzle affectionately.

"For a cat named Stormrunner, you seem to be worn out from such a short walk," Silverkit joked. The black queen rolled her eyes.

Morningkit wished, "I hope Swiftstrike is my mentor! He's just so cool."

"Hah! You won't stand a chance with him," Silverkit remarked. "He trains his apprentices really hard. Quailpaw told me that he felt like his legs could collapse at any minute after his first day."

"Don't worry, I can stand a chance against him!"

"All cats who are old enough to hunt, gather around the high rock for a clan meeting," Pebblestar yelled.

Morningkit sprang from his spot to the high rock. He cried, "Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh! It's gonna start!"

"FrostClan will be having a new cat who will train with us to be a warrior. Morningkit, you have reached six moons and it is time for you to become an apprentice," Pebblestar announced. "From this day on, until you have earned your warrior name, you will be known as Morningpaw. Your mentor will be..."

Morningpaw's tail swayed rapidly from side to side. He could hardly hide his enthusiasm.

"...Swiftstrike. I hope he will pass down all he has learned to you," Pebblestar continued.

Absolute glee was seen on Morningpaw's face. He was glad he got a who he wanted. Swiftstrike was one of those warriors who would laugh at the face of danger. That was something that Morningpaw had always admired about his soon-to-be mentor.

Swiftstrike walked towards Pebblestar. "Swiftstrike," she said. "You have recieved excellent training from Doehoof. You have proven yourself to be a fast and brave warrior. You will be the mentor of Morningpaw."

The warriors walked towards Morningpaw and they touched noses. "Morningpaw! Morningpaw! Morningpaw!" the Clan shouted.

Morningpaw ran to Stormrunner. "This has got to be the greatest moment of my life!" he mewed.

"I'm so proud of you, my kit. I pray to LightClan that you will train to be an excellent apprentice just like your sister, Nightpaw."

Leafkit groaned, "It sure feels great to finally be an apprentice."

"It's alright. We're 5 moons old remember?" Silverkit reminded.

Swiftstrike padded towards Morningkit. "When it's rising-moon, visit me in the warrior den. I don't like waiting, so be there on time."

"What for? Am I going to clean moss beds?" Morningpaw asked.

Swiftstrike hissed. "No, I'm going to give you a task to start your training. Just wait and see, got it?"

Morningpaw nodded with a big smile plastered across his face as his mentor walked away. "I'm gonna prepare for my first day of training. Maybe I'll also pick my moss bed!"

Silverkit replied, "I hope you find a bed with ants in it."

Morningpaw gagged with disgust. "Yuck! I hate ants! Oh well, I gotta go now, bye guys!" The cheerful yellow apprentice rushed to the apprentice's den.

Silverkit turned her head to face Leafpaw, sighing, "Don't tell me you're going to-"

"I'm gonna hunt again!" Leafkit mewed, sticking her tongue out. Silverkit simply groaned in response as she walked away.

Silence filled the air, causing memories of Leafkit's dream to flood her mind again. She kept on wondering who her father really was.

'Hold on, what if Pebblestar knows? She must know! I mean, she's my mother!' Leafkit decided. She padded towards the graceful leader who was returning to her den.

"Pebblestar! It's me, Leafkit!" Leafkit called. "Can I ask you about something?"

Pebblestar nodded. With an airy tone which sounded like she wasn't paying attention, she uttered, "Sure, just make it quick."

"So... I've been wondering... who exactly is my father? I don't remember seeing him at all and I just really want to know!"

Pebblestar's face froze, as if she had just seen a flying hedgehog. "Y-you don't have to know that, Leafkit." She softly whispered to herself, "I hope you *won't*." Leafkit heard it, however she didn't want to comment on it.

Pebblestar hurried to her den. Disappointed, Leafkit found herself more confused than ever.

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The sun slowly set and the moon took its place. Leafkit walked towards the clearing in front of the nursery. Gentle sounds of crickets were heard. A faint glow shined on her surroundings, the moonlight subtly highlighting her pelt. 'Perfect, my prey won't be able to see me since it's dark!' Leafkit said to herself.

Once she spotted a mouse, she started to stalk it with precision. She jumped and attacked it, pinning it to the ground. However, it wriggled wildly and slipped out of her paws. 'Fox dung!' Leafkit thought.

In the silence, she heard silent paw steps. When she searched for the source of the sound, she spotted a shadowy figure standing near the camp entrance. 'Who's that?' Leafkit wondered.

The small she-kit crept towards the figure, avoiding stepping on sticks and stones that might alert her presence. She hid behind a bush and watched closely. The shadowy figure turned out to be a tom. Oddly, he was going out of camp all by himself.

After tilting his head rapidly to check if any cats were watching, the tom raced outside. 'He's escaping! I better go catch him!' Leafkit thought. She chased after the tom relentlessly. Fortunately, the tom wasn't very fast. He clumsily padded through the forest, occasionally tripping over small rocks. Because of this, Leafkit caught up to him easily.

After running for a few tail-lengths, Leafkit couldn't chase him any longer. Her paws ached terribly after running so long, her legs turning into fragile twigs. She came to a halt and panted out of exhaustion. Instead of continuing her chase, she decided to take a look at the tom from afar who had stopped to sniff the air.

His fur was as red as an apple with brown ears and paws. His body kept on wobbling and shaking as he stood in the middle of the tall willow trees. 'No wonder he was clumsy. He can't even stand still!' Leafkit thought.

The tom started running again to the direction of a stream. Leafkit followed him once she gained the energy to do so. The ground became more slippery the closer she approached the water. It was hard for Leafkit to walk through the wet terrain. She was afraid she would lose her balance, so she moved slower.

The tom stopped once more. He sniffed the air again, moving towards a hole in the ground. It was beside the stream, lined with small plants. He dug into the hole and stuck his head inside, visibly

tackling something that was in there. Leafkit moved forward to get a better view. Fuzzy, white fur was seen between the tom's claws. 'A rabbit?' she wondered. 'Why would he be hunting rabbits this late?'

The tom grabbed the rabbits by their necks as his face gleamed with satisfaction. His tail wagged rapidly like how a dog would act after it received treats from its twolegs. His pelt flashed with pride as he carried his prey in his mouth.

Leafkit stepped towards the rabbit hole - or at least what used to be one. 'He didn't even leave a scrap of fur!' she said to herself. The smell of blood was present in the hole. Though she wanted to see what was inside, she knew it was too deep for her.

As she followed the tom back to the camp, she suddenly fell. The slippery dirt had given her a hard time maintaining her balance. In an instant, her body slipped towards the edge of the water. She found herself dangling off a tiny ledge which was right next to the stream. Her tiny claws tried to grip onto the soft soil. She held on tightly as her hind legs squirmed above the rushing water.

"Help! Someone help me!"

A/N: hawyee done rewriting this chapter too

Chapter 4

"Help! Help!" Leafkit cried. Her frantic mews grew stronger as she felt her grip loosen. No matter how hard she held on, she kept slipping off the ledge slowly. The tom was nowhere to be seen.

'Where is he?' she thought. 'He can't be too far from here already!'

"Help!" she cried again, this time much more loud and clear. "I'm about to fall off-!"

Her claws couldn't hold on any longer. She fell into the stream, barely making any sound.

Leafkit struggled as the rushing current pulled her underwater. She gasped for air once she reached the surface. Gurgling water splashed against her face. She could barely yell since water filled up her mouth. The only sound that escaped from her mouth was shriek wailing. Her paws paddled frantically as she was trying to stay above the surface.

"Help!" she yelled. Her tiny mews were almost silenced by the sound of rushing water.

She was fully submerged again. Water rushed into her throat as fast as a rabbit can run. Bubbles slowly trailed out of her mouth as she sunk deeper under the stream. Her eyes looked up to see if any cat had come to save her. However, all she saw was the fast water rushing beside her. Even if she tried to swim back up again, it would be useless. Soon enough, she was fully unconscious.

Leafkit's eyes shot open when she felt something tug against her neck. It carried her to the surface in an instant. She gasped for air and panted loudly, coughing out the water from her lungs. She looked up to see a figure that loomed over her - it was the tom.

"Are you okay?" he asked, his voice laced with concern.

Leafkit shivered terribly. "I-I'm fine. Just a b-b-bit cold."

The tom squinted his eyes at her. "Hey, you're Pebblestar's kit, right? Why are you so far from the nursery?"

"Why am *I* so far from the nursery? Why did *you* sneak out?"

"That's none of your business!"

Leafkit stood up suddenly and wore an angry expression. "I'm not a kit, I'm 5 moons old! Plus, you're not supposed to go out... right?"

"I was just hunting, kit. You know, normal apprentice stuff."

"But there are no cats with you. I always see cats together when they're hunting."

The tom thought for a moment, then he nervously laughed. "Hah, I was just, uh, taking a walk to see the scenery!"

"Yeah right. You must be eating prey for yourself!"

"You're smart for a kit. I'll tell you what I'm up to as long as you don't tell anyone, okay?"

Leafkit nodded hesitantly. He continued, "I'm hunting tonight so that my hunting mission will be easier tomorrow! Once Featherstep sees all this prey I've stocked up, I'll be a warrior in no time."

"But you need to catch fresh-kill. This is uh... not fresh!"

The tom scoffed. "Pshh, whatever. Prey is prey, fresh-kill is fresh-kill. I'd do anything to be a warrior now." Leafkit giggled at the words of the mischievous apprentice.

"We should go back to camp now, I know the way back," the tom advised. "You're Leafkit, right?"

"Yeah! And you are...?"

"Owlpaw, the one and only from FrostClan!" Owlpaw tilted his head

up and puffed up his chest with pride.

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"Hey, it was nice meeting you, Owlpaw. Thanks for saving me back there," Leafkit thanked Owlpaw as soon as they arrived at camp.

"Yeah, it's nothing, I wouldn't let any kit be fish food. I'm gonna go back to my den, I'm getting sleepy!"

Leafkit watched the red tom enter the apprentice den with small, silent pawsteps. As his body disappeared into the darkness of his den, she sighed. 'I should probably go back to the nursery,' she thought. 'Foxtuft must be worried about me!' She walked to the nursery carefully, avoiding any leaves that might crackle under her paws. Most of the queens and kits were fast asleep, so she didn't want to disturb their peaceful slumber.

"There ya' are, Leafkit!" Foxtuft whispered angrily, with a distressed face. "Where in the name of LightClan have ya' been?"

"I was, uh..." Leafkit trembled as she tried to come up with an excuse.

'I'll tell you what I'm up to as long as you don't tell anyone, okay?' Owlpaw's words echoed in her mind. She didn't want to break the promise she made to her new friend.

"I found a large puddle! I fell into it and my fur is now wet! I didn't come back earlier because I knew you'd be mad seeing me like this," the kit lied.

Foxtuft shot her a skeptical look. However, she decided not to question it further. She sighed and looked at the ground. "Alright, Leafkit. Let's go to the medicine den, ya' must be freezing from all that water in yer' fur."

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"Ugh, don't you cats know how high the moon is right now? Molestripe is finding yarrow. He'll be back later," Robinpaw growled from the medicine den. He was sorting some herbs,

carrying them delicately.

"This is an emergency! Hasn't Molestripe taught ya' how to heal cats on yer' own?" Foxtuft asked with a glare. "Leafkit fell into a large puddle and she's freezing. Can ya' help warm her up?"

Robinpaw groaned. "Fine, fine, I'll get some feverfew, they should help lower her temperature."

He walked towards an area where herbs were stored only to find out that the feverfew is gone. "Ugh, the kits must've messed up the herbs again! This is why I don't let those little rascals come here, but did Molestripe listen? No!" Robinpaw muttered, loud enough so that Leafkit and Foxtuft could hear.

He found the feverfew under a bush and gave it to Leafkit. Soon, she felt a bit warmer. As Leafkit sat calmly, she noticed a part of Robinpaw's ear has been torn off. "Woah, how did you get that torn ear?" Leafkit asked with wonder.

"Nothing too interesting, kit. Just got attacked by a random tabby," Robinpaw mewed. "From the city where I came from, cats have nastier scars than just a simple torn ear. Trust me."

Leafkit was curious of Robinpaw's origins, "You weren't born in the Clans?" Robinpaw nodded.

Once Robinpaw was done treating Leafkit, Foxtuft thanked him and they both padded back to the nursery. The queens and their kits were already asleep, gently snoring in the quietness of the night. After they entered, Leafkit finally laid in her moss bed. She quickly fell asleep, exhaustion taking over her body.

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The day that Leafkit anticipated for so long has come. In the span of a few weeks, she was finally old enough to become an apprentice. She could hardly contain her excitement as she waited in front of the high rock.

"All cats who are old enough to hunt, gather around the high rock for a clan meeting," Pebblestar called.

"It's starting, let's go!" Silverkit mewed cheerfully to Leafkit. The two cats stepped into the clearing.

"FrostClan will be having two new cats who will train with us to be warriors. Leafkit, Silverkit, you have reached six moons and it is time for you to become an apprentices. From this day on, until you two have earned your warrior name, you will be known as Leafpaw and Silverpaw."

Leafkit gazed upon Pebblestar, her heart filled with the same glee as an apprentice who had just caught their first prey.

Pebblestar continued, "Leafpaw, your mentor will be Doehoof." A gray she-cat padded towards the clearing with a calm smile.

"Doehoof, you have recieved excellent training from Torrentflow. You have proven yourself to be a loyal and clever warrior. May you pass what you have learned to this apprentice." Doehoof and Leafpaw touched noses awkwardly since she was far taller than her apprentice.

Next, it was Silverpaw's turn. "Silverpaw, your mentor will be Littlefoot." Littlefoot walked excitedly to Silverpaw.

"Littlefoot, Foxtuft has given you excellent training. You have proven yourself to be a hard working and determined warrior. May you pass on what you have learned to this apprentice." Silverpaw and Littlefoot touched noses as the Clan cheered.

"Leafpaw! Silverpaw! Leafpaw! Silverpaw!" the Clan cried with pride. Leafpaw was thrilled to finally be an apprentice. Her face was full of cheerfulness while Silverpaw showed hints of anxiousness. The two new apprentices of FrostClan walked towards Owlpaw and Morningpaw.

"Congrats!" Morningpaw greeted. "How do you feel?"

Leafpaw answered first, showing confidence, "Amazing. I never thought ceremonies would be this exciting! Right, Silverpaw?" Silverpaw didn't answer. She seemed to be spacing out.

"Silverpaw!" Leafpaw yelled, causing Silverpaw to jump. Her gray

fur bristled. "What's got you all worked up?"

Silverpaw got on her paws and shrugged. "I don't know, I'm just nervous, that's all. I can't believe we'll have to carry the Clan's responsibility on our shoulders soon."

"Me too, but hey, at least we're apprentices now."

Owlpaw slowly trotted towards the two new apprentices. He congratulated, "Congrats, little kit. Or should I say... apprentice? You too, Silverpaw."

"Thanks! It's, uh, Owlpaw right?"

"The one and only from FrostClan! You're not drowning in rivers again, are you?"

"How about you? Still hunting not-so-fresh-kill?" Leafpaw and Owlpaw giggled together.

Morningpaw chimed in, "You know Owlpaw already?"

"It's a long story..." Leafpaw let out a nervous laugh.

"Come on, let's pick your moss beds! You should sleep near us!" Morningpaw excitedly meowed. He ran towards the apprentice den and the others followed.

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The apprentices munched on their fresh-kill. Leafpaw glanced at SIlverpaw, noticing the worried look on her face.

"Hey, what's up with you?" she asked. "You've been acting like a frantic mouse ever since the ceremony started!"

Silverpaw seemed hesitant to answer. She kept her back hunched up in a defensive position. "I don't know. I saw a something lurking between the trees near our camp and it gave me a bad feeling."

Leafpaw's head tilted in confusion. "What? Are you sure you're not imagining things?"

"I know what I saw! Something tells me it's not a good sign, as if something bad might happen."

Leafpaw comforted her agitated friend. "Don't worry, Silverpaw. It was probably just a rabbit or something. No need to worry!"

Silverpaw smiled a bit. "Yeah, maybe it was just a rabbit. After all, my mother has always said that I have a strong imagination! You're probably right, nothing bad's gonna happen-"

Out of nowhere, a cry came from the camp entrance. Leafpaw whipped her head to see Swiftstrike running towards the clearing. He panted terribly, as if he just witnessed something horrible, his eyes wide with shock. Leafpaw trotted towards him along with some of her Clanmates.

"S-something happened when I was out hunting," Swiftstrike stuttered.

A/N: Thanks a lot leafpaw you were totally right :))))

Chapter 5

"What happened?"

"Are you hurt? Did something injure you?"

"Where have you been?"

"What did you find? Was there an intruder?"

Endless questions and murmurs from the Clan seemed to overwhelm the light gray tom. He shook his head in confusion.

"Let him talk," Pebblestar demanded, looking at Swiftstrike with her usual cold stare. "What happened, Swiftstrike?"

Swifstrike opened his mouth as his body trembled. "I was out hunting near the Stream Of Leaping Fish. It was all normal until... I s-s-saw... Runningspirit. His body was laying on the ground with a large cut on his neck. I ran back to camp as soon as I could with his body." He gently placed Runningspirit's lifeless body onto the ground. There was a deep slit on his throat along with a myriad of fresh scars. His mouth and eyes were wide open, as if his attacker surprised him before his death.

The whole Clan meowed with sadness and confusion. Even though Leafpaw had never met him, she still felt a pang of sadness, causing her to lower her head.

Pebblestar stepped towards Runningspirit's dead body. "Runningspirit was one of the bravest warriors in the Clan. I wish for him to hunt happily in LightClan together with our ancestors." She gave his fur a lick and looked up towards Swiftstrike.

"Swifstrike, do you have any clue of who possibly did this?" she asked the senior warrior.

Swiftstrike shook his head slowly. "However, I did smell strange scents that does not belong to any other Clan I know. It smelled like fox dung and it was fresh by the time I saw Runningspirit's body." Pebblestar nodded in understanding. She walked away to let cats see Runningspirit one last time.

Foxtuft ran to his body, tears pouring from her eyes. "R-Runningspirit! No, no!" She placed her head on top of her mate's neck. Leafkit felt bad for Foxtuft. 'She lost a cat she deeply loved, I can't imagine how that feels,' Leafpaw thought.

"I will never forget ya', my love. I will pass down yer' stories to our kits, Blazekit an' Owlpaw," Foxtuft cried. "I hope ya' are in a better place now, watchin' us all from above."

Blazekit and Owlpaw approached their mother. Grief was seen in Owlpaw's eyes. However, Blazekit looked more confused than sad. The two cats approached their father's body and sat next to it.

"What happened to Runningspirit?" she mewed. "Is he asleep?" The fluffy kit nudged Runningspirit's body repeatedly, trying to wake him up. "Come on, get up! Get up!"

Foxtuft put her tail around her kit. She whispered, sobbing as she spoke each word, "He's dead, Blazekit. He's now a star in the sky, just like our ancestors who have passed."

Blazekit lifted her head. "Will he ever wake up?" Foxtuft shook her head with sorrow.

"I think they'll have a vigil, or at least Foxtuft will," Morningpaw said.

"What's a vigil?" Leafpaw asked.

"From what I've heard, when a cat dies, Clanmates who feel that they are close to that cat will have a vigil."

Leafpaw pitied the mourning cats. "I feel really bad for Foxtuft. She and Runningspirit must've been so close to each other!" Morningpaw nodded in agreement.

Doehoof walked to Leafpaw with her head lowered. "Runningspirit and I used to be very close friends. We hunted together a lot and shared many stories," she mentioned. "I will have a vigil with him tonight as well."

Leafpaw looked up. "Did you two train together as apprentices too?" Doehoof simply nodded, her face frowning.

"I remember him being a swift and confident hunter," Doehoof told her apprentice. "Despite being born a kittypet, he was able to hunt twice the amount of fresh-kill I got." She chuckled a bit as she said those words. An somber silence fell between the two as they watched the Clan grieve for their lost warrior.

Pebblestar stepped onto the high rock. "The loss of Runningspirit is very shocking and tragic. We all mourn for his death. I shall appoint Breezeheart and Torrentflow to bury him. You two will bury him at moon-high."

Leafpaw asked, "I don't know if it's the right time to ask but... when will we start training?" Her eyes were filled with hope, after all she had longed for her first day of training.

"We'll start soon. Meet me at the camp entrance when it's sun-high. We'll take a tour of our Clan territory for today together with Silverpaw and Littlefoot," Doehoof decided, her face beaming up a bit.

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The scent of the forest filled Leafpaw's nostrils. She padded next to Silverpaw as leaves crunched with each step she took. She heard the faint sound of flowing water and the occasional noise from tiny animals. Although it was cold, she found herself enjoying the walk. Her large, green eyes looked up to see the remaining leaves on the willow trees, some of them were already falling off as she watched. She was amazed by the sight.

"It looks pretty, doesn't it?" Doehoof commented, as if she could read Leafpaw's mind.

"I've always wondered why the leaves on trees always fall during leaf-fall," Leafpaw admitted as she gazed upon the tall trees. "Do you know why?"

Littlefoot answered, "You see, leaf-bare is very harsh for all beings, even for trees. However, during leaf-fall, they prepare by drying up their leaves to conserve water. But a few moons later when new-leaf arrives, they grow back again! This teaches us all an important lesson of how we can all heal with time and patience."

Silverpaw's face seemed to be more relaxed as she heard her mentor's words. 'She must be feeling better,' Leafpaw thought with a tiny smile. 'Littlefoot is right, Silverpaw can heal from having to see that horrific tragedy!'

The sound of rushing water became louder and louder each step Leafpaw took. She tasted the air and she knew she recognized it. After a few more steps, the dried leaves on the ground were replaced with slippery dirt and shiny pebbles. They finally stopped once they reached the edge. 'No wonder this place seems familiar... This is the river I fell into as a kit!' she realized, her eyes wide with surprise.

Leafpaw was standing at the exact location where Runningspirit had been murdered. She examined the scene and noticed that the blood on the ground looked a bit odd. It seemed as if the killer had tried to clean the blood off its paws by scraping it onto the dirt. The thought sent a shiver down Leafpaw's spine, but she quickly brushed it off as being a coincidence.

"This is the Stream Of Leaping Fish," Littlefoot explained enthusiastically. "It a river which stretches across all the of the four Clans' territories. It represents our connection with each other. Imagine if one area dried up, the other Clans would be affected as well! It's just like how the four Clans need each other to survive."

"Why is this stream called that way? Are there really leaping fish?" Silverpaw asked.

Doehoof answered, "Technically, there are. These fish leap out of the water and up the tall waterfall. Although it is a lovely event, we

should be careful since bears come near here when it happens and snatch up the fish like a snake who hasn't eaten in days! They hate to be disturbed and might attack you if you do so."

Leafpaw's fur bristled as she heard those words. She had heard of bears from Foxtuft's stories. She'd always imagined them to be large and scary with huge teeth, growling as they anticipate for their next meal. 'Maybe I can watch the fish leaping from afar...' she thought to herself.

"Are we allowed to hunt the fish here when the bears aren't around?" Leafpaw asked.

"No, it's against the traditions of all the Clans. Even though it's not listed in the Warrior Code, it is very disrespectful. These fish are what help keep the river flowing."

"The Warrior Code... I've heard cats talking about it before but I never knew what exactly was in it."

"The Warrior Code is a set of rules we all live by. It was created by the founders of the four Clans."

"I know that, but what do the rules say?"

"Usually, apprentices only learn it during their warrior or medicine cat ceremony. It's not important for you to learn now, so don't worry about it."

"Our journey continues here, follow me!" Littlefoot ordered.

A/N: finally done rewriting this chapter yeeeessss

Chapter 6

"This is SparkClan's border. Do you see that large rock over there? That's where their territory starts from," Littlefoot stated. Leafpaw's large eyes gazed upon the rock. It was practically twice her size.

Doehoof said, "SparkClan cats are known for their great climbing ability. Since they live next to mountains, they need to scale up the rocks with nothing but their own legs."

"The air smells odd..." Silverpaw commented. "It feels like tiny ants are crawling up my nose."

"Oh, these mountains used to be active volcanoes. A long time ago, our savage ancestors fought for food and territory a lot! This angered LightClan terribly."

Silverpaw crouched in fear. "What did LightClan do next?"

"They made the mountains of SparkClan explode! Many cats died, but those who learned to work together managed to escape safely. These survivors are the cats who started the four Clans." The apprentices gasped with awe.

'That sounds like the story Foxtuft used to tell us!' Leafpaw thought.

"You two seem to be lacking in the history of the Clans," Doehoof snickered.

Leafpaw chimed in, "Foxtuft told us this story once but she never told us the part about the mountains. No wonder she did, I wouldn't be able to sleep for days if I heard this as a kit!"

"I don't blame her. It is quite a gruesome story. Oh, it's already sunfall. We should speed up if we want to catch our last spot!"

The four cats ran through some trees. Their pelts ruffled in the wind. Finally, they reached a thicker part of the forest. Unlike

FrostClan territory, there were far more willow and oak trees. Sounds of birds filled Leafpaw's ears.

"We have arrived at WillowClan's border. The cats of this Clan are the best jumpers, they can hunt a bird mid-air," Littlefoot explained.

"They live on top of an old tree called Great Willow. It's over a hundred years old, making it sturdy enough to handle the whole Clan on its branches," Doehoof finished.

Leafpaw asked with round eyes, "How about GustClan? Where do they live?"

"Remember the volcanoes that aren't active anymore? GustClan cats live on top of the peaks. They prefer strong winds blowing into their fur which is why they picked a high location."

Littlefoot added, "They are also strong, swift, and agile. This is how they manage to run up and down the mountain quickly."

"Look at that, it's almost moon-rise. We should get back to camp. You two must be hungry," Doehoof said with a warm smile.

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The bright moon glimmered onto the ground, turning crisp leaf-fall leaves into silver flakes. The air grew colder as the sun disappeared. Leafpaw, Silverpaw, and their mentors had just arrived in time for a meal. They entered camp to the sight of their Clanmates eating.

"Woah, that was so exciting! And, er... tiring," Leafpaw groaned.

Silverpaw invited, "Come on then, let's grab a mouse to eat."

Doehoof stopped the two apprentices. "Before you two eat, you need to learn an important Clan tradition. You must feed the elders first before you feed yourself."

"Ugh... alright then," Leafpaw complained. She and Silverpaw grabbed two mice and rushed to the elder's den just like little kits. They entered carefully, dropping the prey they carried.

"Why hello there, is that Leafkit and Silverkit?" a blue-gray tom rasped. "My two favorite kits from the nursery!"

A black she-cat with different eye colors retorted, "Torrentflow, they became apprentices today. This is why you should pay more attention to Clan meetings."

"Torrentflow, Breezeheart, we brought you some fresh kill!" Leafpaw mewed.

Torrentflow's face lit up. "Thank you so much. You two can share these mice with us, first day of training must be tiring," he answered thoughtfully. Taking a glance at Silverpaw, he asked, "Hey, Silverkit- I mean paw! You're being awfully quiet. Is something wrong?"

Silverpaw shook her head while forcing a smile. 'She doesn't look any better than before,' Leafpaw thought with concern.

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"Leafpaw, you're back," Owlpaw greeted with a wide smile on his face. "How's first day of training?"

Leafpaw ran towards him in the apprentices' den. She responded, "It was super fun! I'm exhausted after exploring FrostClan territory though..."

"Seriously? You're tired after a little walk outside of camp? I bet you haven't seen the hunting areas yet. If you want to be a true warrior, like me, you need to learn how to travel long distances without getting tired."

"Well how do you get used to it? Plus, when I caught you sneaking out as a kit you kept on tripping." The two apprentices chuckled.

"Actually the reason I sneak out in the first place is to get used to walking. I've been doing it since the day I became four moons old! Don't tell anyone, though."

Leafpaw took a deep breath. "I'm really sorry about Runningspirit. He seemed like a great warrior."

"Yeah, he's a huge inspiration to me. Despite his kittypet origins, he was a courageous cat! I gotta admit we weren't that close since he was always busy with his warrior duties. Whenever I try to talk to him, he'll say he needs to take care of some patrol or something. But I still care for him," Owlpaw's whiskers twitched as he said those words.

Leafpaw sympathized with Owlpaw. "I kind of get how it feels like, you know, having a parent that barely feels like one."

"You do?"

"As much as I respect Pebblestar, she feels so distant from me. I barely get to talk to her and I sometimes forget she's my own mother! Yet, I'm constantly reminded of it by my Clanmates who treat me like some kind of superstar just because I'm the leader's daughter. It's great... but what's the point if it doesn't feel like she's my mother?"

Owlpaw stood up and wore a sorrowful smile. "Leafpaw, I'm glad I saved you from that river. Well, I gotta have a vigil for Runningspirit now. Sniff ya' later."

The red tom went to the clearing in front of the high rock where Runningspirit's body laid limp. He was accompanied by Foxtuft, just as Leafpaw expected. The two grieving cats made no sound as they sat in front of their lost clanmate. Leafpaw felt bad for them. She can't imagine what it feels like to lose a cat who'd close to her.

Not long after, Morningpaw and Quailpaw entered camp with mouths full of mice and birds. They dropped it onto the fresh-kill pile and took one piece for themselves. The prey they caught weren't fat, but the amount they carried was impressive.

Leafpaw looked at the two apprentices. Morningpaw was looking cheerful while Quailpaw wore a rather upset face. Leafpaw wondered why their expressions were wildly different despite bringing the same result.

"Hey Morningpaw!" Leafpaw called, padding towards him. Morningpaw gave his chest a lick and lifted his head.

"Hey Leafpaw! How's your first day of training?"

"It was fun, me and Silverpaw traveled around FrostClan territory."

"Did you see a bear sleeping in its den? I've never seen one in my whole life!"

"I didn't, but it was fun nonetheless." Suddenly, Leafpaw lowered her tone. "If you don't mind me asking, why is Quailpaw looking so sad? He caught so much prey!"

Morningpaw shrugged. "It's probably because Swiftstrike has been yelling at him."

"Why would he do that?"

"I have no idea. He's been saying stuff like 'you call this a bird? This is hardly more than a baby mouse, kittypet!' which probably made Quailpaw upset. It was really weird. But he complimented me a lot, though!"

"Ouch that's harsh." Leafpaw took a look at Swiftstrike who had just entered camp. Swiftstrike looked back at her, giving her a chilling stare.

'Does Swiftstrike hate cats who aren't Clan-born *that* much? No wonder he yelled at Sheepkit and Quailpaw!' Leafpaw thought.

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Leafpaw woke up with a cold shiver. The air was dry and very chilly. She stood up, looking outside the apprentice's den. The ground was covered with something white. She noticed that the forest seemed quiter than usual, unlike her usual mornings where she heard birds and small animals.

She stepped outside slowly. Her paw immediately jerked up as soon as it touched the freezing, white substance on the floor. 'It's so cold! What in the name of LightClan is this?' Leafpaw complained to herself.

"Huh, snow is finally here," Owlpaw commented out of nowhere, as

if he could read Leafpaw's thoughts. "I'm guessing this is your first time seeing it. You look like a kit touching water for the first time!"

Leafpaw giggled with amusement. "Snow, eh? I think Foxtuft told me about it when I was a kit."

"Roar!" a shrill yowl startled Leafpaw. She was tackled to the cold ground. "Seriously, Leafpaw? After me doing this trick countless times you're still scared?" It turned out to be Silverpaw wearing a wide smile on her face.

Leafpaw kicked Silverpaw's belly and stood above her. "Even if I'm scared, I've picked up a couple of fighting moves!"

The two apprentices started play fighting in the snow. They felt like they were kits again. Leafpaw butt headed the gray apprentice, causing both of them to tumble towards Swiftstrike.

"What do you two think you're doing?" he growled with an unpleasant face. Leafpaw and Silverpaw instantly sat up. "If you two want to be real warriors, act like one! The Clan could use some actual help during these harsh seasons, not some kits pretending to be apprentices." He walked away baring his teeth, muttering something under his breath as he gave Leafpaw a cold stare.

"Ugh, Swifstrike's such a buzzkill. We were just having fun! How does he not see that?" Leafpaw complained.

"We should probably listen. I mean, if we want to be warriors, we need to follow what other warriors say, right? Especially a senior warrior like him. Let's, er, get prepared for training."

Leafpaw grumbled, but she decided to follow Silverpaw's advice anyway. 'If Swiftstrike had never scolded us, we'd be having a good time!' she thought.

A/N: Swiftstrike is stinky garbage man do not interact

Chapter 7

The two apprentices rushed into the warriors den to meet their mentors. Doehoof was inside chatting with Featherstep, however Littlefoot was nowhere to be found. Leafpaw walked towards Doehoof with Silverpaw behind her.

"Hello, Doehoof!" Leafpaw greeted excitedly. "What's our task gonna be today?"

Doehoof paused for a moment. "Me and Littlefoot were planning on training you two separately for today. The bad news is Littlefoot's been coughing a lot this morning, so he's being treated in the medicine den now. He always sickly during leaf-bare."

Silverpaw was surprised. "Sick?" she asked. "Will he be alright?"

"He'll be alright, Silverpaw. He may be sickly, but he is quite resilient. Since I'm not the best at teaching two cats at once, I'll try to find someone who can replace Littlefoot."

"Say no more, Doehoof," Featherstep joined into the conversation. "Owlpaw is going hunting at sun-high. Maybe Leafpaw can come with him! He's a pretty good hunter and can probably teach her some basic hunting techniques. It will also be good practice for Owlpaw when he becomes a mentor!"

Doehoof thought for a second. "That seems like a good idea. Leafpaw, you will go with Owlpaw at sun-high to learn basic hunting techniques. Silverpaw, you'll train with me at sun-high but at a different location."

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Are you up for the challenge?" Owlpaw said.

Leafpaw replied enthusiastically, "It's not a challenge, silly! It's just

training. C'mon, let's get going!"

They ran off to a clearing near SparkClan's border. The ashy smell of the mountains filled Leafpaw's nostrils. The clearing was so full of snow that her paws left a mark wherever she stepped. She noticed that the forest was much quieter than usual.

"Featherstep told me I need to teach you basic hunting tactics. Are you ready?"

Leafpaw nodded cheerfully. Suddenly, there was a small rustling sound in the snow. Leafpaw barely noticed it, but Owlpaw instantly crouched once he heard it. 'Is that what a hunting crouch looks like?' she thought.

"Leafpaw! Crouch down like this!" Owlpaw whispered. She instantly curved her back, her legs spread apart and her body low. Owlpaw chuckled quietly.

"What's so funny?"

"Is that a crouch or are you just imitating a badger with a missing leg? Don't spread your legs and keep your tail low. When hunting, prey won't see you this way."

Leafpaw followed his advice. She peeked into a hole and saw a small mouse running around inside.

"Try to catch that mouse. After that, I'll judge how you hunt!" Owlpaw ordered.

Leafpaw slowly came closer to the mouse. Her paws stepped into the thick snow which surprisingly helped to keep her balance. Then, she took a leap and snatched the mouse in her paws.

"Caught it!" she yelled. Owlpaw stood up from his crouching position and walked towards her. He was pleasantly surprised.

"Woah, that was a really good catch, especially for a new apprentice! And you were lucky too, the mouse you caught isn't as thin as most prey during leaf-bare."

Leafpaw purred at his praise. "I've always loved catching mice as a kit. Silverpaw used to make fun of me for it but I knew it'd be useful one day." However, she wasn't focusing and the mouse managed to squirm out of her paw. "Fox dung! It ran away!" She tried to chase the mouse again, however Owlpaw stopped her.

"Hey, relax! Mice are pretty difficult to get a grip of, especially during leaf-bare when your paws get slippery from the snow. Next time, unsheathe your claws like this!" He took a scrap of moss from a tree and curled it up into a ball. He threw it, then caught it with his claws as if it were a tiny mouse.

"Ohhh... Can I try again? I think I got it this time!"

Leafpaw's ears perked up, picking up a foreign sound. A huge bush rustled nearby. Leafpaw's fur bristled as her whiskers twitched. 'It's so loud, I don't think it's prey!' she thought.

Owlpaw instantly went into a defense crouch, trembling as the rustling grew louder and louder. "Leafpaw, don't move," he warned, his eyes wide and alert.

A loud yowl filled the air followed with a cat jumping out of the bush. It leaped for Leafpaw and attacked the young apprentice.

Leafpaw was pinned to the ground. She raked the opponent's belly using her hind claws. It screeched, jumping off her swiftly. Then, Owlpaw ran and clawed at the cat's shoulder. It hissed and bit Owlpaw's front leg. He headbutted the cat's flank, making it lose balance and falling to the ground. Owlpaw stood over it. It scratched his face in response, making him jump up.

"Leafpaw, get back to camp and get help! Don't wait for me!"

As much as Leafpaw wanted to stay and fight too, she complied and head straight towards camp as fast as she could. Her heart pounded loudly and a rush of fear fueled her body. Then, she caught a whiff of something in the air. 'I smell FrostClan! Maybe they can help!' she thought.

She padded to the source of the scent. She arrived at The Stream Of

Leaping Fish. There was a border patrol containing Morningpaw, Quailpaw, Swiftstrike, and Mistypelt. Leafpaw rushed towards them. She halted, panting terribly from all the running.

Leafpaw yelled, "O-Owlpaw! Help! He's being attacked by a cat near SparkClan's border! I don't know who the cat is but-"

"Less talking, apprentice! We need to get there now!" Swiftstrike demanded. The patrol instantly dashed to Owlpaw's location. 'I hope he's okay!' she thought.

A/N: Dang poor leafpaw she just wanted to hunt some mice but uh oh here comes random murder cat!!!

Chapter 8

The patrol arrived near SparkClan's border where they found Owlpaw wrestling with the unknown cat. They clawed and bit at each other. Owlpaw was losing losing the battle. Although he knew a couple of fighting moves, the cat's movements were too fast for him to handle. It pinned Owlpaw to the ground using its claws and was about to strike him.

"Owlpaw, no!" Leafpaw called with concern in her voice. Her eyes were wide open, her body shaking. The cat stopped attacking in an instant once it saw the patrol.

Morningpaw reassured her, "It's alright, Leafpaw. We'll beat up this cat who tried to hurt our friend!" The cat wore a scared expression when it heard those words, probably due to the amount of cats present.

"Morningpaw, stop acting like a kit and grow up. Even if you've been training with me for only a moon, you should know that we are not savage felines unlike outsiders," Swiftstrike scolded.

Mistypelt stepped forward. She asked, "Who are you and what are you doing in FrostClan territory?"

The cat sat up with a grimace. Leafpaw paid attention and observed that the cat was a light gray tabby tom. He was full of battle scars and wore a damaged purple collar. 'He must have been a kittypet who stumbled upon our territory! I don't see why he'd want to kill Owlpaw,' Leafpaw concluded.

"My name is Bootsie. I, er, was a house cat, but I was abandoned by my owners. So, I decided to venture off into the woods," Bootsie started. "I was very con-"

"Stop saying useless fluff, kittypet!" Swifstrike snarled. "We want to know why you're here, not your life story. Or do you prefer getting

a couple of scratches?"

"I may have lived a life of comfort but I won't stand being treated like dirt." Bootsie's tone was surprisingly stern. "I never knew that you forest cats could be so hostile and brash!"

"How dare you speak to me like that, filthy outsider? You are trespassing on our territory and you shall be treated however we deem suitable!" Before Swiftstrike spit another insult, Mistypelt shot him a disapproving look, causing him to reluctantly stop. He continued, "You still haven't answered the question. *Why* are you here?"

"I want to join your Clan. Ever since I was abandoned, my food ran out and I lack proper hunting skills. I'm very sorry for hurting one of your friends, I thought he was going to hurt me."

Swiftstrike scoffed, lifting his chin. "I suppose we should let Pebblestar decide his fate. Let's go back to camp. Leafpaw, help carry your friend over there who got defeated by a soft kittypet." He tilted his head, signalling the others to follow, including Bootsie. Leafpaw assisted Owlpaw to walk since he was injured during the fight.

"Are you okay?" Leafpaw asked. Her eyes were wide with worry.

"Don't worry! I-I'm fine... Can you drag a 9 moon old cat to the medicine den?"

Leafpaw stayed silent. Concern filled her eyes.

"Seriously, seriously, I'm fine! Let's change the topic if you're gonna waste your time worrying. How about... that Bootsie guy? I don't know about you hut he seems pretty sketchy." He bared his teeth at the thought of the kittypet.

Leafpaw simply shrugged. 'I don't know what his deal is but he does seem slightly suspicious,' she told herself.

———

"Molestripe? Robinpaw? Owlpaw got injured," Leafpaw called into

the medicine den. Molestripe approached her and inspected Owlpaw's wounds.

"What happened to him?" Molestripe asked. "Those scars are pretty bad!"

"Got attacked by a kittypet, as embarrassing as it is," Owlpaw answered.

Molestripe wrapped Owlpaw's scars with cobwebs and applied a paste made from herbs. "This might sting a little!" The red tom winced at the pain.

"That wasn't so bad, right?" Molestripe chuckled. "Speaking of attacks, the recent attacks have been really concerning, don't you think?"

Leafpaw lifted her head with with curiosity. "Attacks?"

"Haven't you heard of them? I gotta admit this rumor is more commonly talked about among warriors but I'm surprised you haven't heard of them at all."

"What do you mean by attacks?"

"They say someone has been targeting FrostClan cats. No one has no idea who the culprit is. Sometimes the victims make it out alive but on unfortunate occasions they die. Y'know, like what happened to Runningspirit. Even my apprentice, Robinpaw, fell victim as well. Luckily he survived."

"Molestripe, stop filling their ears with gossip," Robinpaw grumbled as he entered the medicine den.

"Oh lighten up, it's an interesting case to say the least!"

"Let all cats old enough to hunt their own prey gather around the Highrock for a Clan meeting!" Pebblestar announced. Cats started to come together beneath their leader. 'I should join,' Leafpaw thought. She padded to the large group of cats.

"Earlier today, we found a kittypet named Bootsie in our territory

near SparkClan border. I would like to thank Leafpaw and Owlpaw for helping us bravely before we proceed." The whole Clan yowled the two apprentices' names with pride. 'This is the first time she's ever been proud of me...' Leafpaw thought with amazement.

"Moving on, Bootsie is a kittypet who needs a place to live. His twoleg owners have abandoned him and he has nothing left. I have decided to let him be FrostClan's newest member. Cats of FrostClan, do you support my decision?" Approving meows .

Swiftstrike let out a hiss of disgust. "Pebblestar, may I voice my opinion?" The spotted she-cat nodded.

"Why should we trust the words of this random outsider? Leafpaw, Owlpaw, and my patrol all saw how well Bootsie fought despite being a starving kittypet. What if he's a spy from another Clan in disguise? Owlpaw is far from a bad fighter and I know he wouldn't be easily beaten like that."

The crowd started murmuring, expressing their agreement with Swiftstrike's statement. Cats who weren't Clan-born, like Quailpaw and Robinpaw, looked offended by his words. Other cats wore worried faces while some were simply confused.

Pebblestar broke the murmurs. "Swiftstrike, I completely see where you're coming from. However, I do believe Bootsie is what he claims to be. I don't think a spy would be able to get a free kittypet collar. Being a kittypet also doesn't automatically make you a bad fighter." Swiftstrike scoffed at her response as approving yowls filled the air again.

"So it is decided. Bootsie will be the newest member of FrostClan. He will be training with us as an apprentice. As a part of Clan tradition, Bootsie, your new name shall be Birchpaw. I will assign your mentor later on after observing your training progress. For now, you will train with Leafpaw and Silverpaw. May you grow to be a loyal warrior of our Clan." Pebblestar stepped towards Birchpaw and bit his collar off. It was already heavily damaged, so it came off easily.

"Birchpaw! Birchpaw! Birchpaw!" the Clan yelled.

A/N: Robinpaw stop being rude to ur mentor smh >:/

Chapter 9

A moon passed swiftly as the season grew colder. Leafpaw and Silverpaw were out on a hunting mission at sun-fall. Birchpaw joined them to pick up some hunting techniques. The three cats trudged through the deep, cold snow as they searched for prey.

"I think I'll try hunting near the Stream Of Leaping Fish," Leafpaw suggested. "Maybe you can try hunting near SparkClan border?"

Silverpaw nodded in agreement. "Who'll Birchpaw go with? I'm kinda hoping it's you since I'm not the best when it comes to teaching."

"Fine, fine, I'll take him with me," Leafpaw raised her tail, signalling Birchpaw to follow her. They trotted to their hunting location. The area wasn't covered with as much snow as FrostClan's camp, however the stream that used flow had turned into ice.

"It's completely frozen!" Birchpaw marveled. He reached out his paw to step onto the ice, however Leafpaw stopped him.

"We're here to hunt, not to risk drowning. Come on, you said you're a bad hunter right? I'll teach you some basic moves." Leafpaw noticed a squirrel climbed down a tree in the distance. "Watch this!"

She stalked the squirrel carefully, making sure each step made little to no sound. Her fur stood on its end because of the cold. After waiting for the squirrel to stay still, she took a big leap and attacked the squirrel. Remembering Owlpaw's advice, she didn't hesitate to release her claws this time.

Birchpaw attempted to crouch like Leafpaw. Tilting his head, he saw a mouse lurking nearby. He stalked the rodent like what Leafpaw did. As he was about to leap for it, his body fell to the ground followed with a large thud. The mouse ran away in the blink of an eye as soon as it heard him.

"Niblet! I couldn't catch it!" he complained, clawing at the snow with frustration. Leafpaw flinched at his sudden outburst.

"It's alright, Birchpaw, just try to keep your balance next time." She demonstrated a hunting stalk, showing how to keep her balance. Birchpaw tried to follow her exact poses but he still failed to catch a single piece of fresh-kill. He snarled aggressively under his breath.

'Is he a cat or a mad lump of fur? I know I'm supposed to get along with him but he's a lot more short tempered than I thought he'd be,' Leafpaw thought.

"How about you watch me hunt instead? The Clan needs to be fed after all. Pay attention to how I stalk the prey," she suggested.

Birchpaw watched the she-cat hunt in the snow. She was able to catch a mouse that was quite larger than usual prey in leaf-bare. Snowflakes fell on her fur as the icy air blew, making her shiver.

"Do you understand now?"

Birchpaw followed Leafpaw's movements closely. His poses had improved yet he was still very rough when stalking.

In a sudden, Silverpaw ran towards the two cats, almost out of breath. A squirrel that Birchppaw was stalking got startled because of her arrival.

Upset, Birchpaw complained, "You made my hunt run away-"

"It's Nightpaw! Nightpaw! And Sandclaw! I saw them being attacked by a badger. C'mon, we gotta help them now!" Leafpaw and Birchpaw followed behind her as they rushed to Nightpaw and Sandclaw's location.

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They finally arrived to the scene to find Nightpaw on the ground, her body was limp and scarred. The badger's scent was still strong meaning it had just left a few moments ago. Leafpaw shuddered at the thought of the savage creature still lurking around in the shadows.

"L-look, guys," Silverpaw quivered. "Nightpaw's leg. It's... it's..." Leafpaw looked at Nightpaw's body. Her leg got torn off by the badger, blood pouring steadily from the wound. Fortunately, her soft breathing could still be heard.

Leafpaw looked around for any sign of Nightpaw's mentor, Sandclaw, but to no avail. "Have you seen Sandclaw at all?" she asked. The other two apprentices shook their head.

"I-I'll carry Nightpaw. You two can head to camp. I'll follow behind," Silverpaw offered. She picked up Nightpaw's limp body and tried to put it on her back. However, she was clearly struggling to carry the weight.

Birchpaw bit Nightpaw's scruff and tossed her onto his back. "Here, here, I'll help." Silverpaw smiled at him with gratitude.

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"Molestripe! Molestripe! Robinpaw!" Leafpaw called. "Nightpaw is terribly injured! Can you help her?"

Robinpaw exited the medicine den. "Molestripe's out finding herbs. Let me guess... an unknown cat attacked again?" Birchpaw laid Nightpaw on the ground. As Robinpaw looked at her closely, his eyes widened with shock.

"Do you think a random cat would be able to rip off her leg?"

"It was a badger that did this to her. I saw the whole thing happening," Silverpaw explained. The gray cat looked uneasy. "She was out with Sandclaw, but we couldn't find any traces of him."

Robinpaw paused for a moment to think. A pang of sympathy could be seen on his face. "She lost her leg, father, and mentor. She also might lose her position as a warrior apprentice. It's a real shame, especially she's one of the best apprentices I've seen." He took Nightpaw's body inside and started to grab some cobwebs to stop the bleeding.

'Poor Nightpaw,' Leafpaw thought sadly.

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To clear off her mind, Leafpaw decided to visit the nursery. She's forgotten how long it's been since the last time she stepped into the location. Entering the den, she spotted Foxtuft sitting on a moss bed, watching the kits playing.

"Leafpaw! It's been quite some time since I've seen yer' face 'round these parts. How have ya' been?"

"It's pretty great, scary stuff happening here and there, but overall much more fun than being an apprentice."

Suddenly, Blazekit joined in the conversation. She mewed excitedly, "Hah! I'm gonna be an apprentice in three moons! Faster than you, Sheepkit, you'll wait another moon after me!"

"No fair. I'll, uh... be better than you in every way!" Sheepkit retorted. The two kits started to tussle and roll in the nursery playfully.

Foxtuft commented, "Classic kits. Fighting and teasing as usual. Oh right, I almost forgot to tell ya'! I've noticed you've been getting close to my son, Owlpaw. He talks about ya' often. He seems to admire ya' a whole heck of a lot!"

"Yeah, he's a great friend. He's really funny and quite the rebel."

"That's Owlpaw for ya', he always knows how to get himself into trouble."

"Have you heard of the attacks lately?"

"Mhmm... they're real scary. It's the freshest talk among the warriors. Everyday, they're buzzing on and on about it! Stay safe out there, Leafpaw. I don't want ya' being the next victim or anything like that." Leafpaw purred warmly in response.

Foxtuft continued, "Now, I have a story that needs finishing... ain't that right Sheepkit? Blazekit?" The two kits nodded with glee. Leafpaw walked out of the nursery and went to the apprentices' den. 'The moon is high up already. I should eat and sleep soon,'

Leafpaw thought.

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"Hey, Leafpaw! Can I share that bird with you?" Morningpaw asked. "I forgot I haven't eaten! Apprentice duties are super distracting."

"Sure, I wasn't planning on eating the whole thing anyway." The two cats ate the bird as if they haven't eaten in a whole moon.

"Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh! Have you heard about Nightpaw?" Morningpaw asked, bursting with panic.

"Of course, I was the one who brought her back here with Birchpaw and Silverpaw!"

"Hold on, hold on... *Birchpaw*?" Morningpaw looked around to see if Birchpaw was anywhere near them only to see no sight of him. Lowering his voice, he confessed, "Let's keep this between us, but uh... I get really bad vibes from that crazy old cat."

Leafpaw was astonished. "Aw come on, first Owlpaw and now you too? He may be aggressive, especially for a kittypet, but he's not that bad."

"Hah! You think that's the only reason I get odd vibes? He sneaks out of camp a lot at night. When I have trouble sleeping and I look outside, it's pretty often that I see him leaving. The only reason I haven't confronted him about it is because I'm afraid I might ruffle his fur the wrong way!"

"Well I can see where you're coming from, but I still gotta say he's an okay cat!"

"What makes you think that?"

"Well, uh..." Leafpaw tried to recall any memory of Birchpaw's nice deeds, but she could only remember his annoyed remarks and hostile complaints.

"Got no answers, huh?"

Leafpaw looked over her shoulder and saw Birchpaw entering the den with a bird. He sat in his moss bed and ate with an unpleasant face. "Fine, I'll try talking to him right here and right now to prove it."

Leafpaw padded towards the gray tabby. "Hey there, Birchpaw!" she greeted. "We haven't really known each other that well despite being Clanmates for a moon. So, why not chat for a while?"

"No," Birchpaw replied, chewing the bird in his mouth. Leafpaw's eyes widened with surprise. Then, the tabby started laughing darkly. "I was just joking. Everyone except for you and Silverpaw seems to hate me so I guess this could lift my mood."

"How's Clan life been so far? Better than you expected?"

Birchpaw thought for a moment. "Honestly, pretty nice. The food tastes better than kibbles of kittypet food. Training is also my favorite part of the day since I get to explore the territory around here."

"I know, right! Personally, my favorite part of the day is at night since I get to talk with my friends and get some rest."

"You're lucky to have friends here. I'm not really close to anyone in this Clan."

Leafpaw felt bad for Birchpaw. "Well, I can be your friend!"

"Thanks for the offer. But, I'd rather be alone while I adjust. Just because I consider you lucky doesn't mean I'm jealous or anything. I'm gonna doze off, so you should probably go take care your own business unless you want to see me growl like a tiger."

'He's a bit weird but not outright mean,' Leafpaw concluded. She instantly stepped away and returned to Morningpaw who looked genuinely surprised. "I told you he's not that bad," Leafpaw purred with a smug look in her eyes.

"Pshh... he's probably seconds away from ripping your throat out. Did you even hear his tone? He sounded like a fox!" The yellow tom started to stretch his body and curl up in his moss bed. "I'm gonna

sleep, good night."

Leafpaw sat in her moss bed, sighing. She was disappointed that cats couldn't see the real Birchpaw. 'The only cats he can get along with is me and Silverpaw! Speaking of Silverpaw, I don't think I've seen her. Where is she?' she thought. 'Oh no, what if she's panicking because of Nightpaw's accident? I gotta find her!'

A/N: SILVERPAW WHERE ARE YOU HONEY??????

Chapter 10

Leafpaw rushed out of the apprentice's den, frantically searching for her friend. There wasn't any sight of Silverpaw anywhere. She raced to the clearing in front of the nursery.

"Silverpaw? Are you there?" she called. There wasn't any response.

She ran towards the medicine den and tried calling again. "Silverpaw! Are you in here? It's me, Leafpaw!"

There was only Molestripe and Robinpaw inside. They exchanged confused glances. "What are you doing here looking for Silverpaw? I hope you're not playing hide and seek!" Robinpaw grumbled.

"I-I haven't seen her at all since moon-high! I'm afraid her mind's going all over the place because of Nightpaw's accident and-"

"Great LightClan, Leafpaw. She's over there!" Robinpaw pointed out. Leafpaw turned around to see Silverpaw sitting behind the high rock.

Leafpaw quickly approached her friend. Silverpaw's eyes were as wide as the moon and her body looked stiff. She was barely distinguishable under the shade of the forest.

"Silverpaw, what are you doing here? You should be at the apprentices' den!"

Silverpaw shook her head. "L-Leafpaw? Oh, I'm sorry for m-making you worried! I, ugh, I just... I don't know how to explain it."

A silence fell among the two apprentices. Silverpaw stared at the ground while Leafpaw wondered about what was going on.

"It's Nightpaw, isn't it? You're acting paranoid like when Runningspirit got attacked." Silverpaw nodded slightly in response, her head facing away.

Leafpaw comforted, "Look, you can tell me anything! You're my best friend, Silverpaw. Do you want to talk about it?"

"No, no... I don't think- think so..."

'I don't think i should force her to tell me,' Leafpaw thought. "Hey, just remember that no matter what, you'll be okay! If anything tries to harm you, it'll have to go through me first. Now, let's get back to the apprentices' den. It's freezing out here!"

The two she-cats padded towards the apprentices' den. They exchanged a couple of jokes on the way. Yet, Leafpaw could tell that her friend didn't sound as cheerful as usual. Silverpaw's tone was laced with worry and her voice quivered a lot. As soon as they entered, they curled up in their own moss beds.

Leafpaw quickly fell asleep just like the other apprentices only to be awoken moments later to the sound of gentle pawsteps. She squinted at the source of the noise, annoyed that someone dared to disturb her slumber.

'Who in the name of LightClan is making that noise?' she thought, her eyes half open.

When her vision was normal, she saw Birchpaw and Silverpaw escaping the den. The moon was still high in the sky and cats haven't woken up yet. 'What are they doing so late in the night?' she asked herself. When the two cats had exited, she followed them silently to see what they were up to.

Leafpaw trudged through the snow, following Birchpaw and Silverpaw. Their gray pelts glistened under the moon's silver glow. The pair was heading to SparkClan's border. An ashy scent filled Leafpaw's nose as she wondered what the two cats were doing. She hid behind a bush and watched silently.

Birchpaw climbed onto a large boulder. He reached the top and meowed triumphantly. Silverpaw instantly dropped into a defensive crouch as the noise filled the air.

"Birchpaw! What are you doing?! Our Clanmates will hear you!" she

panicked, her fur standing on its end.

"Don't worry! They'll think it's an owl or something. Come up here!"

Silverpaw climbed the boulder hesitantly. She unsheathed her claws and started to climb the large rock. Once she was at the top, she sat down and tried to calm herself down. Her shoulders tensed as she stared down at the ground which was far below her.

"Don't look down, look at me," Birchpaw whispered, as if he could read her mind. "You've been, er... less annoying than usual. Something bothering you?"

"No."

"Just because I've only known you for a moon, doesn't mean I can't tell when your brain's not where it's supposed to be."

Silverpaw shook her head with uncertainty. "I'm telling you, everything's okay. Why do you want to know?"

"If no one in the Clan seems to give a single darn about how weird you're acting, then I guess one cat knowing is a good start. Darn, you can tell me anything. I won't judge, I promise."

Silverpaw didn't utter an answer. She kept her head low to the ground.

"Silverpaw? Hey, you there?"

"I'm serious, it's nothing, it's nothing! Y-you don't have to-"

"It's Nightpaw's accident, right?" Silverpaw exhaled and nodded. Her shoulders relaxed, her fur laying flatter than before.

"How did... how did you know?"

"Duh, it was horrifying. Do I need to say more?"

Silverpaw chuckled dully at Birchpaw's bluntness. "Heh, I guess you're right."

"So, uh, you're afraid a badger might jump out behind you at night?"

"Well, it's a bit more complicated than that."

"How so?"

"Lately, I've been... scared. Really scared. Recently, random cats have been attacked by someone and no one knows what it is. It may be a cat or.... something else. It's been on my mind a lot lately. Now that Nightpaw's accident has proven how dangerous the outside world truly is, I can't help thinking about when I'm going to be next!

"Will it be tomorrow? Next moon? Is it a few tail-lengths away? I can't shake it off at all. I can't shake off the feeling of something lurking in the shadows, ready to strike when it gets its chance. And you wanna know the worst part? There's nothing I can do about it. I-I-I know, it's really... really dumb." Those words slipped out as fast as a flowing river. Birchpaw frowned sympathetically.

"Have you ever told anyone about this?"

"I wanted to share this to Leafpaw as well, but I haven't really gotten any time to do so. Apprentice duties are making both of us busy and even though we train together, we barely get any private time."

"Hasn't she noticed your behavior? You two are close right?"

"She's tried asking me why I've been acting so frightened, but I just don't know how to say it to her without making a fool out of myself. I get so nervous and anxious and scared that trying to talk to her feels like jumping off a cliff sometimes."

Leafpaw felt bad for her. She eased her body and slowly sat up from her crouching position, still keeping her body low to the ground. 'Turns out Birchpaw really does have a heart. The FrostClan cats who doubt him just don't see who he is on the inside,' she thought.

"Look, I have no clue how to help you and your fears."

"Wow. Thanks."

"No, seriously, I wish I could! But, I may have an idea."

He let out a loud yowl. The noise instantly scared away any prey nearby. SIlverpaw jumped with surprise.

"Birchpaw! What are you doing?!" she yelled.

"What do you think I'm doing? I'm teaching you how to live life. Face it, life's scary. Like you said, can we do any single thing about it? No. But can we try to embrace it? Absolutely!" He yowled again, even more loudly this time.

"What does that mean?!"

"You don't see it, do you? You'll never have a fulfilling existence if you keep on cowering under a rock! So, sometimes, you just gotta be in the face of danger no matter how hard it is. And hey, once everything's said and done, it's gonna be alright!" He yowled even louder and Silverpaw followed him. The two cats made so much noise that it felt like the forest was shaken to its roots.

'What are they doing? Are they out of their minds? Someone from camp might hear them unless all of FrostClan has moss in their ears!' Leafpaw thought. She was glad that Silverpaw seemed to be coping well, but that doesn't mean they should be yelling like dogs.

Suddenly, a Silverpaw stopped yowling and Birchpaw stopped as well. Silverpaw lifted her head to sniff the air. "I smell a FrostClan warrior nearby. What should we do?" she whispered.

"We run, of course!"

The two cats sprinted away as fast as a snake biting at a mouse, heading to FrostClan's camp. Leafpaw wanted to follow them, but she stayed in her place. She knew she'd alert the two cats if she made another move, so she ducked under a bush. As she peeked through the leaves, she saw Silverpaw and Birchpaw disappearing into the trees.

"Leafpaw!" a cat hissed. Leafpaw jolted up suddenly. She turned her

head to see Skunktail, the Clan's deputy. The older cat's nose was scrunched up, her eyes squinting aggressively. Leafpaw's tail spiked up.

"H-hey, Skunktail."

"What are you doing here?! It's the middle of the night. You should be sleeping in your den, not running off to LightClan knows where!"

"I w-was just-"

"Just what? Scaring away the prey? I heard you yowling at the top of your lungs before."

Leafpaw was confused on what to do. As much as she'd like to defend herself by mentioning her friends, she didn't want to snitch on them, especially since Silverpaw was being comforted by Birchpaw. No cat asked her to follow the two apprentices anyway, so this was partially her fault.

"I was... playing around. I, er, chased a butterfly and yelled to intimidate it!"

Skunktail paused for a moment. She scoffed, "C'mon now, return to your den. It's already late at night and you shouldn't be playing like a kit. I expect better from the leader's daughter."

She flicked her tail, signalling Leafpaw to follow her back to camp. They padded through the thickening snow as their trail was lit with the moon's glow.

'I can't believe she thought I had to act slightly better than the other apprentices just because my mom is important!' Leafpaw thought, frustration furrowing her face.

A/N: i finished this ages ago and realized i havent posted this here yet hAh

also rewritten alreadyw hoo almost finished isdhifhfua

Chapter 11

The sun rose the next morning. Leafpaw sluggishly got up from her moss bed, still clearly exhausted from the earlier night. She looked around the apprentices' den with tired eyes. In a corner, Owlpaw was stretching as if he had just woken up as well.

"Well, you look as ruffled as a badger," Leafpaw teased, walking towards the red tom.

Owlpaw yawned, "Finally you're awake! You never wake up this late. Not only that, you still look sleepy. Did you spend all night chasing a blue mouse?"

"Oh, I was just uh, having trouble sleeping last night! What are you up to today?"

"If I'm not mistaken, Featherstep's gonna test my fighting skills, the usual. But I did hear some cats mentioning that I'll join the gathering tonight, so that's really good news. I haven't joined one in two moons!"

"I hope I'm joining as well, gatherings seem fun."

"They are! It's ripe with gossip too. Last time I entered a gathering, I heard that Needlestar, SparkClan's leader, was secretly mates with Torrentflow when he was a warrior."

"What? That *can't* be true. Are you just messing with me?" Owlpaw laughed at Leafpaw's skepticism.

"All cats who are old enough to catch their own prey, gather around the high rock for a Clan meeting!" Pebblestar called. Every warrior, apprentice, and elder stepped out of their den to listen to their leader. Leafpaw padded towards the clearing.

"As you know, tonight's full moon marks the latest gathering of all four Clans. The cats joining the gathering are Skunktail, Doehoof, Littlefoot, Breezeheart, Stormrunner, Robinpaw, Leafpaw, Owlpaw, and Morningpaw." 'Yes! I'm joining the gathering!' Leafpaw thought excitedly.

"I also have another announcement to make. Last night, Nightpaw and Sandclaw were attacked by a badger while out training. Nightpaw is severely injured, while Sandclaw has disappeared. Last moon-rise, our border patrol couldn't find any trace of him, which means the badger most likely killed him. Tonight, a vigil will be held to honor our fallen warrior." Mews of grief were heard from all cats. 'Sandclaw must've been a great warrior. What did he do to deserve this?' Leafpaw thought with sorrow.

Pebblestar dismissed the meeting. The graceful leader stepped down from the high rock. A voice in Leafpaw's head told her to talk to her mother, so she approached Pebblestar, walking slowly as her body filled to the brim with anxiety.

"Pebblestar? Can I talk to you for a moment?" Leafpaw asked softly.

Pebblestar looked surprised. "Sure, Leafpaw. How's apprentice life so far? Exciting?"

"Uh, it's great!" Leafpaw fidgeted with her paws as she spoke.

Pebblestar tilted her head affectionately. "Have you learned how to hunt yet?"

"Yeah, yeah. I have learned it a few moons ago." 'Wow, for a Clan leader, she's bad at small talk. Does she even know the first thing about me?' she wondered.

"I'm sorry, Leafpaw. You know, for being so caught up with my duties. I wish I could spend more time with you, but I'm not sure-"

"Pebblestar, I need to discuss something with you," Swiftstrike interrupted. "It's very urgent."

Pebblestar paused for a moment to think. "Very well, Swiftstrike. Sorry, Leafpaw. I have to take care of something. I'll see you

around."

"But, Pebblestar!" Leafpaw insisted, reaching her paw out. However, her mother had gone into the leader's den before she knew it. She groaned, frustrated with the fact that she failed her attempt to have a normal talk with someone she should know well. 'Others think I'm lucky to be the leader's kit, but I'd beg to differ!' she thought.

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"Someone's looking grumpier than usual," Doehoof commented, stepping towards Leafpaw. "Something nagging your tail?"

Leafpaw hung her head low. "It's nothing..."

"Cheer up then, Leafpaw. We have a long day to practice fighting before the gathering," Doehoof reminded. She sat down to lick her chest fur.

Leafpaw lifted her chin. "Fighting? Finally! I've been waiting for us to actually do it!"

Doehoof purred. With a tilt of her head, she signaled Leafpaw to follow her. The pair trotted through the frosty snow.

Doehoof stopped once they reached a clearing in front of a large tree. Leafpaw leaped onto a rock which was half her size, balancing on it for fun. However, she failed to keep her body stable enough, causing her to fall. Doehoof chuckled at the funny scene.

"Are you sure you can defeat your enemy if you're as clumsy as that?" she asked while giggling.

Leafpaw instantly got back on her paws. "I can, I was just, uh, sleepy!"

"Well, you're most likely going to face enemies at any time - sleepy or not. Which is why I'm training you to be well skilled at any condition." Without warning, she crouched and leaped for Leafpaw's side, instantly knocking her over.

"Hey, I wasn't ready!"

"Exactly. However, as a warrior, you must be ready at all times. Never let down your guard, your enemy won't fight you fairly. I suppose now would be the best time to show me your fighting moves. Pretend that I am your opponent."

Doehoof wrestled with Leafpaw, pinning her to the ground. Leafpaw instantly kicked her mentor's belly with her hind legs. Doehoof let out a shriek, bouncing off of Leafpaw.

"That was quite impressive, you reacted better than before. But can you avoid this?"

She ran straight to Leafpaw as fast as a diving bird. Leafpaw dropped to a defensive crouch, dodging the attack. Doehoof rolled to the ground. She sprang back up and twisted around Leafpaw. As brisk as the wind, she clasped Leafpaw's back onto the dry, hard snow.

"Woah, how did you do that?" the apprentice asked, bewildered.

"It's simple - you have to outsmart the cat you're fighting. I've seen you train, you're a smart cat and I know this wouldn't be too difficult for you. Now, try to outsmart me."

Leafpaw stood up firmly. Her eyes scanned the area, trying to take advantage of her surroundings. She spotted a large tree which seemed easy to climb. 'I'll run to Doehoof at full speed, then I'll climb that tree quickly. After that, I'll jump off of it and land on her!' she planned.

Leafpaw charged at Doehoof. She ran in a zig-zag pattern to confuse her mentor. Doehoof dodged with ease, but she did not see Leafpaw's next move coming. Leafpaw climbed up the tree and jumped off. Landing on Doehoof's back, she tried her best to stay on. Despite her efforts, Doehoof shook her off without breaking a sweat. Leafpaw panted, laying on top of the icy frost.

Doehoof complimented, "It seems like you were listening. Although your way of using your environment to your advantage is quite impressive, you need to improve on your speed and your strength. You took way too long deciding on what to do. If this were a real battle, your enemy would've torn you to shreds by now."

"Aw, can I try again?" Leafpaw requested. Doehoof beamed at the apprentice's boldness.

A/N: YESSSS FINALLY DONE REWRITING UNTIL THIS CHAPTER I'M SO HAPPY TIME TO S L EE P

Chapter 12

The ivory sun set, turning snow into flakes of gold. Leafpaw's legs grew sore from the continuous fighting. On the contrary, pride swelled in her body. She had so much fun training her fighting skills all day long.

"Wow, you sure are a tough nut," Doehoof pointed out, letting out a huge sigh. "But you know what they say, 'a nut's gonna crack open if you smash it with a rock for too long'. Let's get back to camp before you turn into a pulp."

"Do we have to go back now? I want to try more moves!"

"You're gonna need that energy for going to the gathering. It's a long walk to get there and I can see you're almost worn out."

Leafpaw admitted to herself, 'Well, she's not wrong. My legs are killing me!' "Gee, alright then."

The two she-cats made their way back to camp. As Leafpaw strolled through the frost-covered forest, she spotted a cat between the trees. Immediately, she recoiled her head back and crouched to the ground. She flattened her ears, anxious of whatever that cat was doing there. Doehoof gave Leafpaw a confused look.

"Leafpaw, what are you doing?"

"There's a cat over there!"

Doehoof squinted at the trees, then laughed. "Oh, that looks like Birchpaw. He's probably out on a hunting mission. I like your instincts, your alertness could be a life-saver. But you should improve on how you recognize others."

Leafpaw's fur prickled with embarrassment. She stood up straight again. "What's a gathering like? This is my first time going and it

seems really fun."

"Ah, you see, every full moon, all four Clans join together at Tall Oak. Each Clan makes announcements and updates about how each of them are doing. It's a great opportunity to bond with cats from other Clans, find out a bit about how they live, or even make some friends. It's nice to see multiple Clans join together without having to break into a fight."

"Without breaking into a fight? How's that possible?"

"There's a truce in every gathering, meaning everyone must interact without violence. Everyone who attends is already aware of that."

"And everyone keeps the truce?"

"Of course! Our ancestors created gatherings as a non-violent meeting, not a battle field. If someone where to start a brawl, LightClan would surely be angered." Leafpaw was fascinated. She wondered about what LightClan could possibly do if a battle broke out during a gathering.

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"Leafpaw, can you help me with something?" Molestripe asked, carrying a cluster of herbs. Leafpaw nodded in response. "Nightpaw needs more cobwebs for her leg. I could use some extra help wrapping them up!"

"Has she woken up?"

"Unfortunately, not yet. She should gain her consciousness again soon based on my predictions, though!"

The fur-less medicine cat trotted away as Leafpaw entered the medicine den. She found a stack of cobwebs lying on the ground. Pulling one of them with her mouth, she carried it over to Nightpaw. The injured apprentice laid completely limp on her moss bed, breathing ever so slightly. Her leg was completely amputated by the badger. Leafpaw couldn't imagine the immense pain she must have felt during the incident. She gently wrapped the cobweb onto her leg. Without warning, Nightpaw's eyes shot open.

"Sandclaw! Sandclaw!" she shrieked, gasping for air. She whipped her head around rapidly like a mother bird who had just lost her eggs.

"Hey, Nightpaw, it's just me! Leafpaw!"

Nightpaw took a deep breath and calmed herself down. "Am I in... the medicine den? Wait, where's Sandclaw? Argh, he must be in the warriors' den." She tried to stand up, but fell to the ground after taking one step.

"Nightpaw, Sandclaw... Sandclaw is dead. He died when you were attacked by the badger. That rabid animal even tore your leg off!"

Nightpaw scrunched up her face in confusion. She glanced at her missing leg. "That's not possible... Sandclaw's *not* dead. He's probably hiding out somewhere! I'm going to go and find him." Before she could run off, Leafpaw stopped her.

"Nightpaw, your leg is injured. You can't even walk properly at this state! You need to stay here in the medicine den. You're not going to find anything, anyways. Sandclaw is dead. He disappeared without a trace and going out to search for him would be dangerous!"

"Who cares about my leg? Like you said, he disappeared. M-maybe he's just escaping from that badger. Unless I see his body with my own eyes, I believe that my father's still alive."

"Woah, woah, woah, what's all the racket in here?" Robinpaw grunted, entering the den. "Oh, Nightpaw's awake. I can take it from here, Leafpaw, you better get going to the gathering. Pebblestar's waiting for you."

Leafpaw went out of the medicine den, looking back at Nightpaw. The gray apprentice was desperately trying to walk, eager to go outside. Leafpaw could hear Robinpaw yelling at her to sit down. However, ordering her seemed to be nearly impossible.

'What a stubborn cat! Did the badger give bees in her brain too?' Leafpaw marveled. She promptly joined the other cats after

Pebblestar called her.

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FrostClan made their way to Tall Oak. They passed through the Stream of Leaping Fish, walking on top of the frozen river which was now sturdy enough to support their weight. Reaching the other side of the bank, they hiked up a hill which was covered with a dense pine forest. It smelled like fresh vegetation and sharp, intense resin. Leafpaw enjoyed sniffing the air. Because of how dense the forest was, there wasn't that much snow covering the ground, making the trek quite easy. After entering a hole in a bush, she spotted a big oak tree surrounded by four gigantic boulders. 'That must be Tall Oak!' Leafpaw thought.

"First time going here, huh?" Owlpaw guessed, taking a seat on top of a small rock. "You look like a kit who just discovered a cool-looking cave. Oh wait, you actually did that once!"

Leafpaw snickered. "Hey, how did you know that? Have you been stalking me?"

"Of course I know. You're the leader's daughter, remember? When you went missing, everyone in the Clan freaked out as if a bear ate all our fresh-kill!"

Noticing a large crowd, Leafpaw gasped in awe. "There's so much cats here! What do you usually do here?"

"At gatherings, I usually snoop around other Clan cats' conversations to find out what their up to or possibly some secrets they're hiding!"

"Well, do you ever find any juicy information?"

"I... I don't think so. Cats are boring these days." The two apprentices snorted at the response.

Leafpaw viewed the large boulders, noticing that four cats including Pebblestar sat on top of them. She didn't recognize them at all, but concluded that they were most likely leaders.

Owlpaw informed, as if he could read Leafpaw's mind, "They're finally here! You don't know them, do you? Well, the dark gray tabby is Needlestar. Cats say he lost one of his eyes because of a hawk attack. Next to him is Vinestar, the red one. She's the most hot-headed out of them, so you better not ruffle her tail. Beside Pebblestar, that white she-cat is Pearlstar. Her voice is very gentle and her pelt shines like the stars of LightClan."

Leafpaw continued to gaze at them with wonder and admiration. A sense of pride filled her heart as she saw how noble Pebblestar looked seated among the other leaders.

"While you're busy staring off into nothing, I'm gonna catch up with my buddies from the other Clans," Owlpaw mewed.

Moments later, an ear splitting yowl filled the air - it was from the four leaders. Murmurs from the audience were quickly silenced.

Pebblestar cleared her throat. "For tonight's gathering, FrostClan would like to begin first. Our prey, although not as abundant as before, is running consistently. We have increased border patrols after a very recent badger attack on our apprentice, Nightpaw, which costed her leg. It is with a heavy heart that I must announce the death of Sandclaw. The brave warrior fought off the badger and has served our Clan for many moons. We will honor his courage and bravery." Sad mews were heard from FrostClan's warriors.

"My Clan mourns FrostClan's loss, Pebblestar," Vinestar rasped. "WillowClan would like to go next. Our Clan has two new apprentices, Redpaw and Fernpaw." Their names were yelled triumphantly.

"Unfortunately, prey has been insufficient in WillowClan's hunting grounds, so we have increased hunting patrols. Near our borders, we have noticed a foreign scent which smells similar to FrostClan quite frequently. We also often spot a cat lurking around the borders almost every night. Are your warriors trying to infiltrate our borders?"

"I would like to add on that," Needlestar requested, tinged with aggression. "SparkClan's warriors have also seen a cat in the middle

of the night dangerously close to our border. I hope your warriors aren't thinking about crossing it. You don't want a battle to happen again, don't you?"

Pebblestar shifted uncomfortably as the crowd gave her suspicious glares. 'A FrostClan cat lurking around their borders *that* often? That sounds like a load of mouse dung to me!' Leafpaw thought.

Pebblestar countered, "I am a firm believer that my warriors would not do anything like that. What you two are seeing may not even be a Clan cat. Who knows? It could be a rouge or a stray kittypet."

"Well, I can hardly tell the difference when many of your warriors weren't born in your nursery," Vinestar belittled.

"Excuse me?"

"Your Clan is filled to the brim with outsiders. Who's to say they won't cause any harm?" Vinestar slandered. Every cat in the audience started whispering, their emotions varying from anger to worry.

"Just because they used to be outsiders doesn't mean they're a threat. They're cats too, just like us."

"How can you place your trust in complete nobodies? That's highly irresponsible and you're putting your Clan in danger. You're also disregarding the Warrior Code."

"My warriors are as loyal as any Clan's, Clan-born or not!"

"That's enough," Pearlstar intervened. "We might anger LightClan! Look at the clouds, they're covering the moon."

Every cat looked up to the sky. Large, gray clouds started to conceal the moon's glow. The leaders grew wary, knowing they might have angered their ancestors.

"Let's continue, *without* arguing." Pearlstar exhaled. "Needlestar, how is your Clan?"

Needlestar scoffed and muttered something under his breath. He

announced, "SparkClan is lucky to welcome two new kits, Harekit and Dawnkit. Luckily, they are growing fast and strong by each day. Our prey is adequate to feed us. The bears have started their deep sleep, making our everyday lives much safer."

Pearlstar mewed gently with a voice as soft as silk, "I guess now is GustClan's turn to speak. This leaf-bare has brought minimal prey to our territory, so our warriors are working hard to plow through the snow for food. Our food shortage has caused the loss of two of our kits. Despite the thick snow that LightClan has given upon us, GustClan will keep on moving forward no matter what." Silent, sorrow meows spread across the cats.

"Now that everything is settled, the gathering is dismissed," Needlestar declared. The four leaders jumped off their respective rocks to escort their clanmates back to their own territory. Leafpaw's mind burned with fury. 'How dare the other Clans accuse us of invading their borders?!'

In the midst of cats padding away, she overheard Vinestar speaking to her deputy with a brash tone. "Rouges? Kittypets?" she cackled. "What's the difference between FrostClan and those outsiders when half of Pebblestar's Clanmates aren't even born in the nursery! She must be so desperate that she's willing to accept any cat that enters her borders. If any of her warriors lay as little a pawstep on our territory, they'll regret it for the rest of their days."

Leafpaw could not believe what she had just heard. She bared her teeth, unsheathing her claws. Her pelt flashed with rage. Without thinking any further, the naive she-cat took a big leap. She jumped onto Vinestar's back, sinking her teeth into the leader's fur. Vinestar shook her body to fling Leafpaw away. However, the apprentice's grip was too strong.

Vinestar hissed violently as she rolled on her back, smashing Leafpaw and leaving her on the ground. As the apprentice desperately tried to get up again, her body ached terribly. A few cats from WillowClan and FrostClan stared at the appalling scene with their mouths wide open. Vinestar shot Leafpaw a disgusted look.

'Our ancestors created gatherings as a non-violent meeting, not a battle field. If someone where to start a brawl, LightClan would surely be angered.' Doehoof's words echoed in her mind.

"Leafpaw! What are you doing?" Pebblestar growled.

"I-I..." Leafpaw was speechless.

A/N: Surprise surprise everyone's xenophobic

Chapter 13

The Clan cats stared down at Leafpaw, their eyes as cold as ice. The apprentice felt dismay tugging at her stomach as she looked at their scowling faces. Cats from both WillowClan and FrostClan were shocked by the sight. Murmurs were heard from all sides, some out of surprise while others were laced with distaste. All Leafpaw could do was lie down on the cold, crisp snow.

"Doehoof, carry Leafpaw to the medicine den and ask Molestripe or Robinpaw to treat her. Swiftstrike, lead FrostClan back to camp. Skunktail, please wait here with me while Vinestar and I have a word," Pebblestar ordered.

Doehoof immediately bit the apprentice's scruff, dragging her back to camp. She followed her Clanmates to their territory. Leafpaw was ashamed of her foolish action. Not only did she embarrass herself, she possibly could have embarrassed her own mother too. She terribly wished that she could dig herself a hole, crawl into it, and stay there forever. Unfortunately, she was being carried like a kit along a snowy trail.

"What an absolutely revolting sight," Swiftstrike grumbled. "The precious Clan leader's daughter doesn't even know the first rule of gatherings; no fighting."

Morningpaw, who was walking alongside him, responded, "Leafpaw would *never* fight another for no clear reason. What if Vinestar was-"

"Whatever excuse that careless apprentice had for quarreling with Vinestar, it is still no reason to break the peace of the gathering!" Swiftstrike's bitter tone left Morningpaw mute. He simply continued to walk, frowning. The conversation gave a foul feeling in Leafpaw's heart. Her body shivered with regret.

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Leafpaw laid on a moss bed in the medicine den, her ears drooping to the ground. She watched as Robinpaw entered as he carried something wrapped in leaves. The medicine cat apprentice sat down with a neutral expression on his face.

"Eat these," he mewed, gesturing at the seeds inside the leaf. "Your body's in shock so these poppy seeds should ease your muscles."

Leafpaw chewed on them and swallowed. Her mind was still spinning with thoughts of what had happened earlier. She sighed with frustration.

Robinpaw comforted, "I heard about what happened earlier. To be honest, it was pretty foolish, but I'm impressed you had the guts to do that. Wanna talk about it?" Leafpaw shook her head, not a word uttered from her mouth despite her having a million things to say.

Robinpaw stood up. "I need to get more herbs to treat Nightpaw. When your body doesn't ache anymore, meet Pebblestar in her den. She wants to speak with you."

"Fox dung," Leafpaw whispered to herself. She knew exactly why her mother wanted to meet her.

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Leafpaw's legs finally were able to support her body. She wobbled a bit while she stood up, anticipating what could come next. Her tail swayed with nervousness as she imagined the possibilities, her mind completely flooded with thoughts. She knew how furious her mother must be. 'Calm down, Leafpaw,' she reminded herself. 'Pebblestar is a fair leader, she'll understand what happened.'

Leafpaw slowly entered the leader's den. Inside, the air was terribly dry. The long leaves that lined the entrance were shriveled up and lacking their color. Flakes of snow were scattered on the ground. On top of a moss bed, Pebblestar was seated. She glared at Leafpaw with penetrating eyes. The anxious apprentice instantly lowered her head as a sign of respect, her knees shaking slightly.

"P-Pebblestar," she stuttered. "I apologize for what happened at the gathering."

"Why did you attack Vinestar?" Pebblestar asked, her tone as sharp as thorns.

"I wasn't- I wasn't thinking straight. I ran towards her and-"

"*Why* did you attack Vinestar?" Pebblestar repeated.

Leafpaw sharply inhaled with guilt. "Vinestar said some awful things. She claimed that FrostClan was full of outsiders and even threatened to shred our warriors to pieces if we dared to enter her territory! I was so mad at her that my anger blinded me. I attacked her without care. I-I'm sorry for what I did."

"That is no excuse to break the truce of the gathering. I'm certain that Doehoof has taught you better, hasn't she? What you did was careless and irresponsible. You are supposed to represent FrostClan and by doing this you are making us an embarrassment in front of everyone. You're lucky you made it out alive."

"But Vinestar was making fun of you, she was making fun of our Clan! I can't let her filthy words run off her mouth without any consequences."

"Watch your tongue, young she-cat. Vinestar may be brash, but she is still a noble leader. You should hold high respect for her. I doubt that she'd outright insult FrostClan in public. I talked to her after the gathering. She told me she was merely criticizing us and meant no harm. I'm greatly disappointed by your actions. Tomorrow, I want you to take care of the elders. Fetch them food and make sure they're in good health."

Hearing those words, Leafpaw's resisted the urge to bare her teeth, so she let out a fierce huff. "That's not fair, Vinestar was insulting you! I was only trying to defend our Clan! I was trying to defend your name!"

"She wasn't insulting me, Leafpaw."

"Yes she was! She called you desperate and irresponsible. She also

made fun of our Clanmates that aren't born in FrostClan! Don't you care about them too?"

"Is she wrong for wanting to protect her borders while acknowledging our acceptance towards cats born outside the Clans?"

Leafpaw was baffled. She stayed silent, pondering about what she just heard. 'There's no reason for Vinestar to say those things! How can Pebblestar not see that?'

"I know that you have good intentions, but that doesn't justify what you have done, Leafpaw. I understand that you may think it's the right thing to do. I am your mother after all, I know you best-"

"Understand? Understand? How can you understand? You've never understood. All my life, you've never been there. You've never cared for me ever since I was a kit and now you say you know me best?"

"Leafpaw, that is enough. We don't have time for this. We are getting out of topic."

"I can't believe it. After turning a blind eye during my youth, the time of when a mother should look after her young, I stand up for you and- and you punish me for it and call me careless!" Leafpaw yelled, her tone as sharp as dog teeth. All the guilt in her mind was washed away by an angry storm.

"You're acting irrational. Listen to me and we'll talk this out."

"No, I've had enough. If my father were still here, I know he'd do a better job at taking care of me than you ever have!" Tears of frustration rolled down Leafpaw's face. Her fur stood on its end as she bared her teeth.

Pebblestar gasped at her daughter's cold words. Flicking her tail, she mewed, "Get out of my den, Leafpaw. I expect to see you taking care of the elders tomorrow."

Leafpaw promptly went outside, her expression full of upset. As she made her way back to the apprentice's den, cats noticed her gloomy mood.

"What's the matter, Leafpaw?"

"Leafpaw, are you feeling okay?"

"Look at that. The leader's little daughter is down in the dumps! She should think twice before quarreling at a gathering."

Leafpaw ignored her Clanmates' comments. With her face and tail drooping to the ground, she finally made it to her own moss bed. The cool air of the night ruffled against her fur. The apprentice exhaled, laying down in a miserable manner.

She felt a paw tap onto her back. "Hey, Leafpaw," Owlpaw mewed. "What you did at the gathering was awesome, albeit a bit dumb, but still awesome!"

Leafpaw didn't respond. Owlpaw reassured, "You aren't usually this... silent. Something wrong? You can tell me anything if you feel like ranting."

The younger apprentice shook her head. "I don't want to talk about it."

Owlpaw frowned. He sat down next to Leafpaw, looking around the den. "Silverpaw's not in her moss bed. She's usually never this late," he commented. "Birchpaw's not here too! Do you think those two are up to something?"

Leafpaw ignored her friend. Her eyes were closed, her whole body finally relaxed. Soon enough, she dozed off. She breathed uneasily as sleep overtook her.

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A strong gust of wind blew at Leafpaw's direction. She woke up, alarmed and confused. All she could see was pitch-black. She panicked for a few moments before realizing that this place felt familiar.

Before she could figure out where she was exactly, a glistening tortoiseshell cat appeared. It approached the young she-cat with a welcoming smile. 'It's that tom from my dream!' Leafpaw realized.

Her heart full of glee, she squealed, "I remember you. You're my father!"

"Leafkit, I've missed you so dearly," the tom chuckled. "Ah, but it's Leafpaw now, isn't it?"

"Yeah, I'm an apprentice now! Hold on, why are you visiting me right now? Are you here to show me a tree again?"

The tom laughed at her question. He tilted his head, signalling Leafpaw to follow him. He made his way through a thick bush. It was studded with beautiful flowers and fresh leaves that the she-cat had never witnessed before. The two cats exited the marvelous shrubs. They were greeted with a large lake which was so clear that they could see the fish swimming inside. The water practically sparkled. A variety of plants lined the edge, adding to the stunning scenery.

"It's pretty, isn't it? Look under the water, there's something you need to see." Leafpaw's eyes widened with curiosity.

The tom showed a mother fish near her eggs. As it protected her offspring, a larger fish came. It attempted to eat the eggs, so the determined mother attacked the intruder. It worked and the mother was left alone.

"That fish was threatened by the larger fish," the tom described. "She knew it was wrong to hurt others, however her eggs were in danger. Therefore, she did what she had to do. I saw what happened at the gathering last night, Leafpaw. You did what you had to do, just like this mother fish, and you were brave for doing that."

Leafpaw grimaced. "That's exactly what I tried to tell Pebblestar. She wouldn't listen!"

"I wish I could have stayed at FrostClan and raise you with your mother. Ever since I left, your mother has been so caught up being a leader that she forgot about you."

"I know, right? It's like I don't even exist to her sometimes. I feel

like things could have turned out better if you were still here! May I ask who exactly you are? You know, before you left."

"I'm afraid not, young one. But I'll leave you with this; among the Clans, you'll find those who are a disease, bringing nothing good with them. They come as they please, ruining the balance of life as we know it. Don't hesitate to bend the rules when it comes to dealing with these fox-hearts."

The land started to crumble and turn into darkness. The tom vanished in the blink of an eye. There was so much Leafpaw wanted to say, unfortunately she was left with only more questions. She woke up, trembling because of the low temperature outside.

As she stood up, she muttered to herself, "Mouse dung, I have to take care of the elders."

A/N: Hey yall!!! first of all, sorry for not posting for a long time. school made me lose my motivation and since summer is here, i'll hopefully be able to pump out more chapters. hope you liked this part skjdksdj

Chapter 14

The harsh cold didn't improve Leafpaw's mood. She felt bored to death, cooped up in the elders' den. The past hour had been spent replacing moss beds and providing herbs for Breezeheart and Torrentflow, the two frail elders.

"Torrentflow, are those poppy seeds reducing your soreness?" she checked.

Torrentflow nodded. "This moss bed is quite damp, however. Would you be a dear and get some more?"

"But I just changed it moments ago!"

Torrentflow advised, "Well, you should get better moss next time."

Leafpaw groaned as she grabbed more moss, making sure it was dry this time. She returned with the new patch in her mouth, placing it on the ground. Torrentflow meowed his gratitude. He plopped down on the comfortable bedding, his whole body far more relaxed now.

Swiftstrike dashed into the den as flakes of snow fell off his fur. "Leafpaw, Pebblestar said you can continue your apprentice duties again," he informed. "You'll be training with me, Quailpaw, and Morningpaw. Now, follow me."

"Finally!" Leafpaw whispered under her breath.

The two cats made their way to the camp entrance. In front of the shrubs, Morningpaw and Quailpaw sat idly. Morningpaw's face brightened up when he saw them approaching, contrasting Quailpaw who seemed more nervous at the sight of his mentor. Afterwards, they all headed to a clearing surrounded by slender trees. The soil was still relatively soft in this area with tiny blades of grass sticking out of it.

"Doehoof has informed me of your progress with your fighting skills. She told me that she's impressed. Judging by her words and last night's feud at the gathering, it seems like you're shaping up to be quite the fighter," Swiftstrike observed. "Very well, I want to see your combat abilities, this time against someone your own size."

"Am I going to be battling Leafpaw? Please, please, please let me!"

"No, I'm afraid not. I'm sending you on a hunting mission instead. Hunt as much prey as you can nearby the Stream of Leaping Fish. Return when the sun starts to set."

Morningpaw excitedly galloped away. Leafpaw was left with Quailpaw in the clearing. The brown tabby tom looked as shabby as a haggard piece of fresh-kill. His legs trembled slightly at the cold. Despite these traits, there was eagerness in his eyes, as if he was ready to take on Leafpaw. Swiftpaw stood between the two apprentices. With the flick of his tail, he signaled for the fight to begin.

Quailpaw took a huge hurdle. His claws stretched out as he aimed for Leafpaw's rear. The she-cat instantly ducked, speeding away from him. After Quailpaw landed, he twisted to scratch at his opponent. Leafpaw cried as she felt nails dig into her shoulder, causing her to shake Quailpaw off. 'Is this a training session or an actual brawl?' she thought.

Quailpaw charged at Leafpaw again. She swiftly dodged, climbing up a tree and throwing herself onto the tom's back. They rolled in the snow, tussling to break free from each other's grip. The apprentices came to a stop once they bumped into a boulder. Leafpaw pinned down Quailpaw with her unsheathed claws in the air. She resisted the urge to hurt the tabby any further so she simply bared her teeth.

"Why are you stopping?" Swiftstrike hissed. "Don't tell me you're going to pause like that in a real battle!"

Leafpaw could feel icy eyes staring down at her, encouraging the fight to carry on. Nevertheless, she was still hesitant to harm her challenger. She exhaled, releasing Quailpaw from her grasp.

Quailpaw was still laying on top of the snow, surprised by Leafpaw's decision. Breathing uneasily, he stood up, taking a few steps back.

Swiftstrike muttered some words to himself, his tone bitter. However, Leafpaw couldn't make out what he was saying. An unsettling feeling loomed over her, telling her that the old warrior would rather see her finish off Quailpaw.

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"I'm back!" Morningpaw announced, carrying two birds and a small mouse in his mouth.

Swiftstrike smiled at the amount of food. "Excellent catch, we'll need it this leaf-bare. Return to camp with Leafpaw and place your prey in the fresh-kill pile. Quailpaw, it's your turn to go on a hunting mission. Hunt nearby SparkClan's border and return at rising-moon. I'm expecting better effort than what you've shown me during yesterday's hunt."

Morningpaw and Leafpaw walked back to camp. Leafpaw glanced at Quailpaw who was talking with his mentor. She perked up her ears, trying to eavesdrop into their conversation.

"S-Swiftstrike, are you proud of my fighting?" Quailpaw stuttered. "I... I did my best."

Swiftstrike scowled at him, not a word escaping his mouth. He walked away into the woods. Quailpaw was left in the clearing, hunched over the ground as the setting sun shimmered on his dull fur. Leafpaw could only gaze at the exchange with pity. Unfortunately, there wasn't much that she could do. She could defend the apprentice, but she didn't want to repeat the mistake she made at the gathering.

Catching up to Morningpaw's pace, she inquired, "How's Swiftstrike as a mentor?"

"He's really awesome! He taught me a bunch of cool tricks I've never seen any other cat do. I have to admit he was quite

intimidating when I first started training but after a few days, he's just been straight up outstanding. I want to be just like him!"

"I saw how he treated Quailpaw earlier and it's... how do I say this, unfair? You see, I was training with him by fighting and I defeated him. Swiftstrike seemed rather unimpressed at Quailpaw's performance even though he was a very tough cat to beat."

"Huh, it's probably because Quailpaw's a slow learner. Swiftstrike does scold him far more often than he scolds me," Morningpaw explained. He didn't seem concerned about Quailpaw's situation at all. "Oh, I just remembered something I wanted to talk about something to you earlier! This is probably sounds out of nowhere but, have you noticed anything strange about the recent attacks?"

"The only strange thing I've noticed is that somehow no one in the Clan has any clue of who's behind them."

"No, no! Well, I mean, that is pretty weird, but besides that. I've just been thinking a lot lately and, well, something has caught my attention. I realized that all the victims are born outside of the Clan!"

"Hold on, *all* of them?"

"I asked Stormrunner about it a few days ago and according to her, the victims have been Skunktail, Sundapple, Hawktalon, Littlefoot, Robinpaw, and Runningspirit. Skunktail was a barn cat, Sundapple and Hawktalon used to be loners, Littlefoot and Runningspirit are former kittypets, and Robinpaw lived in the city before joining FrostClan!"

"That is strange," Leafpaw agreed. As she carried on with her journey back to camp, she thought, 'I'm getting to the bottom of this!'

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"Now, hold still," Leafpaw ordered. She delicately applied mouse bile onto Breezeheart's ragged pelt. She crouched down as she tried to cover all the infested spots in the elder's fur. Sitting back up

again, she exhaled with satisfaction.

Breezeheart rasped, "Thanks an awful lot, Leafpaw. Those darn ticks have been chomping on my fur like a rabid squirrel!"

"I remember my days as an apprentice. I was quite the rascal back then, always getting myself into trouble. I often found myself taking care of elders as a result."

"Do you recall the time you tricked the whole Clan into thinking there was a bear in camp? That was a classic! Oh, and don't forget the time you scared some SparkClan apprentices in their own territory, another classic!" The two elders' laughter filled the den. Leafpaw's eyes widened with amazement. 'Who knew older cats could be as mischievous as me!' she thought.

Torrentflow sighed. "It's a shame the younger cats'll have to look behind their tails whenever they want to have any fun. The menace that has been killing our Clanmates are frightening and could attack at any moment. Back then, everything was so much safer. Most of us didn't even have to look twice before going out of camp alone at night!" Breezeheart nodded in agreement.

"Do you happen to know anything about the recent attacks?" Leafpaw asked, hoping to find out anything useful about the mystery.

Breezeheart thought for a moment. She recalled, "Oh, I sure do have something to say about them. My sweet, sweet mate Sundapple died because of the hound-heart behind these attacks. I remember that moment so clearly to this day."

"I'm sorry to hear that. If you're comfortable sharing it, can you tell me what happened?"

"The two of us were hunting together. Sundapple chased a pigeon into a thick part of the forest. He didn't come out for a long time, so I assumed he was having trouble catching the bird. That was until I heard the loudest shriek I'll ever hear my whole life. I ran to Sundapple's location to see if he was okay, but it was too late." The tender she-cat started to sob at the memory, leading Torrentflow to

calm her down.

"Do you remember what his murderer looked like?"

After a small sniffle, Breezeheart described, "The moon was already rising so I couldn't see that clearly. When I saw Sundapple's body, in the distance I noticed something running away and it definitely looked like a cat. Clearly, it was a tabby and from what I could tell, it had gray-like fur, a bit light in color if I'm not mistaken. But I am sure that whoever took my mate's life smelled strongly of fox dung. It probably used that scent as a disguise."

"Thank you so much for your information, and I'm sorry for your loss. I'm sure Sundapple's in a better place now." Breezeheart beamed with gratitude, yawning quietly before she lay down to sleep. Torrentflow tilted his head to let Leafpaw know that she could return to her den.

The apprentice padded to the fresh-kill pile. She picked out a small dove and hurried back to he apprentices' den. Shaking off bits of frost from her pelt, she thought about what Breezeheart had said. 'A light gray tabby with fox dung scent? Who could that be?' she asked herself.

She sat herself down on her moss bed and feasted on her meal. She took a bite out of the the cold, hard meat. As she chewed slowly, she felt a nudge on her shoulder.

"Can I share this dove with you?" a voice said which she immediately recognized as Silverpaw's.

Leafpaw nodded with a smile. "How's training today for you?"

"I went on a border patrol. It was quite fun. Me and Owlpaw even got to see a bear sleeping in its den! Cats say they're supposed to look horrifying but all I say was a snoring, slobbering lump of fur."

"Glad to see you acting more like your older self. Imagine that bear screaming in fear when we try to invade its den, that'd be the funniest thing I'd see all day!"

"You're right! It'll run away with its tail between its legs. Anyways,

have you seen Birchpaw? He hasn't been in camp since sun-fall."

"Well, I haven't seen him either. Maybe he's on a hunting mission-"

Her words were interrupted by an ear splitting yowl from outside. The two apprentices rushed to the source of the noise to find a cat running towards camp from the forest. It panted heavily once it arrived, its legs shaking terribly. Leafpaw immediately identified the cat as Quailpaw, his body full of scars. Small droplets of blood rolled down his flank.

'What happened to him?' Leafpaw thought. Before she could get an answer, the tom collapsed onto the ground.

As cats hurried over to see what was going on, something caught Leafpaw's eye. Birchpaw had just returned, his fur messier than usual and carrying some prey in his mouth. 'Why did he come back to camp this late? And why did Quailpaw return badly injured?' Leafpaw pondered. Suspicion rose in her body, causing her to shudder.

A/N: Whooo i'm done with this chapter! Had a lot of fun w/ Torrentflow and Breezeheart in this one

Chapter 15

"Leafpaw, carry Quailpaw to Molestripe so his wounds can be tended to," Pebblestar ordered.

In a flash, Leafpaw bit the back of Quailpaw's neck and dragged him to the medicine den, his fur brushing against the thin layer of snow. Leafpaw placed him on top of a moss bed. She could see the injured cat's chest rise and fall slowly, indicating that he was still alive.

"Great LightClan! Quailpaw's as wrecked as a crumpled log! Is this another attack?" Robinpaw exclaimed with a sense of urgency. Leafpaw nodded in response. "Nightpaw, can you pass me some cobwebs?"

Nightpaw emerged out of a dim corner in the den, her mouth full of cobwebs. She limped to Quailpaw's motionless body and dropped them gently.

"Remember what I taught you, Nightpaw. Patch up the open wounds with the cobwebs. Make sure they're tight and cover the whole area."

Using her steady paws, Nightpaw wrapped the cobwebs around Quailpaw's scars. Her face frowned at the work she had to do, drooping like a saggy rabbit. Despite her negative attitude, she worked effectively. In little time, Quailpaw's wounds were covered fully.

Leafpaw praised, "You did a great job! Did Molestripe teach you?"

"A little bit."

Silence filled the medicine den. Only the sounds of worried murmurs from outside could be heard. Leafpaw watched intently while Nightpaw continued to work.

Breaking the silence, Nightpaw whispered awkwardly, "Er, can I tell you a secret?"

"Um, sure, I won't spill any of it." A tinge of confusion laced Leafpaw's voice

After a glance around the den, Nightpaw confessed, "Ever since my leg was torn off, it's been painfully obvious to me that Pebblestar wants me to be a medicine cat."

"Really? That's great news!"

"No... it really isn't. Not for me at least. I don't want to be forced into this position!"

"Why not? Medicine cats get to help other cats and talk with LightClan! That sounds cool."

"It's not as simple as the role sounding cool, Leafpaw. As great as being a medicine cat may be, I just... don't want to go down that path. I've always dreamed of being a warrior since I was a kit and a missing leg isn't going to change that."

"Wait, isn't that dangerous-"

"Leafpaw, you can return to your duties now! We're grateful to have helpful cats like you around here," Molestripe mewed.

Leafpaw trotted back to her moss bed. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't stop pondering Nightpaw's words. 'I admire her determination but I doubt she could be live her life as a warrior with her injury,' she thought.

———

Leafpaw could smell the Stream of Leaping Fish nearby. Large sheets of snow covered the ground, making her legs seem invisible. Her paws constantly sunk into the white mass. Trying to maintain her balance, she wobbled with each step.

Even though the sounds of her own steps distracted her, she couldn't stop wondering about what happened the night before

when Quailpaw returned to camp injured. Her thoughts flooded her mind as she reached no answer.

"Uh, Leafpaw you've been pulling weird faces all day," Owlpaw commented. "Did you see a flying mouse or something?"

"No. It's just that I noticed something weird after Quailpaw was found injured yesterday." Owlpaw perked his ears up, curious of what Leafpaw was talking about. She shook her head. "I don't know. It sounds stupid, it's not worth mentioning."

"If it's not worth mentioning, why are you still thinking about it?

Leafpaw simply recoiled her head with uncertainty.

Owlpaw persuaded, "C'mon, you can tell me anything. I won't judge."

Leafpaw slowed down her pace. "Well, I saw Birchpaw return right after Quailpaw was found injured. He returned alone and there were no night patrols! Don't you think that's odd?"

"Huh, that is odd. I've never trusted that cat the first time I laid my eyes on him. He's a well-skilled fighter for a kittypet - too well-skilled in fact."

"He has been acting weird ever since he showed up in FrostClan. But I'm sure he has good intentions! I still don't know why he came back that late, though." Owlpaw simply huffed in response, a sour expression placed on his face. Leafpaw concluded that it would take a million moons for Owlpaw to trust Birchpaw in the slightest.

The two apprentices stopped walking once their paws could feel the rough dirt of the Stream of Leaping Fish. The frozen river glistened softly, its icy surface reflecting the sun's light. Cold winds were stronger in the area due to the lack of trees.

"Doehoof said we should hunt near here," Leafpaw reminded. "Maybe we can look under pockets of snow! Some rabbits might be sleeping in their burrows."

Owlpaw nodded his approval. The two cats immediately started to

track down any prey they could find.

Leafpaw kept her body low to the ground. Her eyes scanned the snow. She soon spotted a tiny gray lump of fur which seemed to be a mouse. With a large leap, she lunged herself onto her target, only for the rodent to scamper away.

Leafpaw chased her prey. It made its way into a small hole, making it impossible for her claws to grab it. She sighed in defeat. As she walked away, she heard a soft rustling noise. Before she could figure out where it came from, a large cat jumped on her.

The cat tugged at her neck, almost piercing through her skin. She sunk into the snow, her back pushed against the freezing soil. Leafpaw wriggled her body under her attacker and climbed onto a tree. Once she was halfway up the trunk, she jumped off, landing on the cat's back. To her surprise, the cat tackled her in retaliation and set its claws into her neck

"Birchpaw, what are you doing?!" Owlpaw screeched from a distance.

The cat, who turned out to be Birchpaw, stopped in an instant. His eyes were wide with shock, as if he didn't realize that he was attacking his fellow Clanmate. His thorn-like claws released Leafpaw. Like water to a dry throat, she was relieved, letting out a sigh.

Owlpaw rushed to the scene. He helped Leafpaw to stand up then scolded, "You nearly ended Leafpaw's life, mouse-brain! Were you planning on murdering her?"

"You dare assume me of doing that? I was on a hunting mission and I simply thought she was an intruder."

"Yeah, you totally thought she was an intruder. No cat I know would mindlessly attack someone from their own Clan!"

"I wasn't thinking clearly, okay?! If I knew Leafpaw was the cat I was attacking, I wouldn't even dare to hurt a whisker on her!"

Flicking his tail, Owlpaw muttered loud enough for the tabby to

hear, "We'll let LightClan decide if yours words speak truth. Let's continue our hunting mission, Leafpaw."

Leafpaw followed him, her legs still shaking. 'That cat is up to no good,' she thought.

A/N: Sorry for the late update! New year of school has been fun but tiring and i've barely gotten the time to write this so hope yall like this chapter (i'm still highly invested in finishing this so i wont stop writing it anytime soon!!)

Chapter 16

"Hey, are you alright?" Owlpaw asked out of concern.

Leafpaw bit into her mouse once she sat on her moss bed. She reassured, "I'm fine, don't worry about it. Birchpaw gave me a few scratches, that's all."

"He practically mauled you! If you need anything, please tell me. I'll ask Molestripe to get some herbs for you."

Owlpaw's words sent a blush to Leafpaw's face. "Thanks, but, I don't need any of that right now. My wounds are healing just fine."

Owlpaw looked away, the sunset light shining on his red fur. He took a bite out of a pigeon he managed to catch. Drooping his ears, he averted his gaze to the falling snowflakes outside.

He huffed, "Birchpaw's got to be up to something, don't you think so, Leafy?"

"Hold on, Leafy? What's that?"

"It's a nickname I came up with!"

"Don't call me that, it sounds weird."

"Just admit it, you like it."

"Never in a million moons!"

"Ugh, you're no fun sometimes." Owlpaw pouted.

"Well, I do agree with what you said about Birchpaw. He seems pretty shady and I don't know what his deal is. It's as if he's always hiding behind a prickly skin."

"Hey guys!" Morningpaw chimed in from the entrance. He hopped

toward the two discussing apprentices. "What'cha talking about?"

Leafpaw waved her paw in response. She whispered to Owlpaw, "Do you think we should tell him about the Birchpaw thing?"

"Tell me about what?"

Owlpaw let out a groan, "Just tell him. He's not going to hurt our chances of finding the truth anyway."

———

Morningpaw gasped, "That monster! I never trusted a single whisker on that cat the day I knew him."

Owlpaw spat, "I don't believe a word he says, especially his excuse for hurting Leafpaw like that."

"I used to think Swiftstrike was ridiculous for not letting him into the Clan but now I can completely see where he's coming from!"

"As much as I hate so say it, I kinda agree with you."

Leafpaw licked a chunk of fur under her paw. Her mind kept on flowing like a rushing river as she pondered the information she received. 'Why do I get the feeling that Birchpaw's a part of something larger?' she asked herself.

"You know what would be crazy? What if he was actually behind the recent attacks in our Clan?"

As soon as those words were spoken, realization hit Leafpaw like a boulder. She jolted up from her moss bed as if a rat had bitten her. The revelation was terrifying but it made so much sense.

"Morningpaw, that's not far fetched at all! Maybe he really is behind these attacks!" she yelped. "That explains everything. You remember what the victims of the attacks said, right?"

"T-they said that the attacker was a light gray tabby. Some of the victims also told me that the attacker was a very quick fighter. Doesn't that remind you of him?" Owlpaw and Leafpaw mumbled

their agreements.

"That also explains why he returned right after Quailpaw was found injured. He must have nearly killed that poor apprentice!"

"That means... he's responsible for the death of my father," Owlpaw croaked. "We need to tell Pebblestar before more cats fall into his claws."

———

"What?" Pebblestar questioned.

Leafpaw insisted, "We know what we saw, Birchpaw's obviously behind all these attacks!"

"I'm sorry, but without sufficient evidence that can prove it, BIrchpaw is innocent." Pebblestar's tail wagging with impatience.

"But we have plenty of evidence. The eyewitness accounts match up perfectly with his appearance and behavior."

"I'd say the evidence *vaguely* matches. The attacker that they described could have been anyone."

"Still, you shouldn't ignore our findings. We finally have a lead to solve this mystery."

"Fine. Let's say Birchpaw really is the attacker. What would be his motivation? What is his goal? Have you ever thought of that?"

"W-well, I don't know... But what if more cats get attacked?" Owlpaw and Morningpaw nodded their heads.

"Then, I'll have to increase border patrols and make sure our warriors are ready for anything. Once again, there's no solid proof that Birchpaw's the attacker. I don't want to spend the whole night debating with you three so it's best that you return to your den."

Leafpaw's heart dropped. She stopped herself from fighting about it even further, remembering what happened after the gathering. All she could do was sigh in disappointment. She started to walk back

to the apprentices' den, her head low to the ground.

"I can't believe it," Owlpaw said in a loud whisper.

Pebblestar turned her head. "What did you say?"

"I can't believe it! So, you're telling me that there's an threat in the Clan and you're doing practically nothing about it?"

"I am doing things to solve the issue. I've been increasing patrols and preparing our warriors. Now, return to your den or-"

"Increasing patrols, really? Really? That's all you can do and have done all this time? Not to mention the fact that we have found a possible answer and you turn us down! How about you? I haven't seen you making any effort to investigate yourself."

Pebblestar was astounded by the apprentice's brave statements. Before she could respond, Owlpaw continued.

"Look, we're going to gather more evidence to prove our point. If you excuse us, we're going back to our dens just like you said. Good night, Pebblestar." He tipped his head with respect and escorted his friends out of the leader's den.

"I'm going to chat with the elders," Morningpaw informed. "You guys can go back without me!" The yellow tom walked away, leaving Leafpaw and Owlpaw behind.

Leafpaw exhaled, "Thanks for standing up to Pebblestar. It takes a lot of guts to say something like that, especially to a leader."

"Ah, it was nothing. I'd do anything for Morningpaw and you, Leafy."

"Hey, I told you not to call me Leafy!"

"What are you going to do about it? Bite my legs off?"

The two apprentices giggled like kits. The dreaded feeling they had in their chests melted away right after. "Sniff ya' later! All this yelling has made me sleepy," Owlpaw mewed while walking away.

'I'm going to prove to Pebblestar that Birchpaw's really behind those attacks,' Leafpaw decided.

A/N: Sorry for the short chapter!! I wanted to cover the realization part specifically without focusing on other plot lines soooo yeah.... hope yall enjoyed it nonetheless

Chapter 17

Leafpaw woke up to the sound of water sputtering. She jolted up, jerking her head to see where it came from. The ceiling cracked as drips of water poured out of it. Frantic, her paws gripped onto the stony wall. She began to trek on the grated, cold surface.

Climbing up the wall, she noticed the water rising beneath her. The liquid sloshed around the cave like a dog without its leash. Soon, she felt a small opening near the top. With her unsheathed claws, she scratched the area, her motion becoming increasingly violent as she felt the water reach the tip of her tail.

Finally, her hard work paid off. The opening grew larger, big enough for her to pass through it. She wriggled out of the tiny hole.

After she sat down, she panted, "Great LightClan, that was treacherous! I nearly died!"

"Yet you survived," a mysterious voice added.

Leafpaw turned around to see a tom with white and brown patches. Her heart soared once she recognized who he was.

"Father! Why have you summoned me to, er, wherever I'm supposed to be right now? I'm dreaming, right?"

"I still meet you with the same energy as the last time we talked. Was escaping that cave difficult?"

"Yes, very."

"Say, has FrostClan encountered any problems lately?"

"There's a mysterious cat who's been attacking my Clanmates! I suspect that Birchpaw is behind them, but Pebblestar won't believe a word I say. The theory does sound far-fetched but I'm certain it's true!"

The tom blinked thoughtfully. "Well, let's go back to what happened in the cave. You didn't know that opening was there. However, you managed to feel it and use it to your advantage, did you?"

Leafpaw nodded. He continued, "Sometimes the answer to your problem - including this one - may not be obvious to most. You need to dig deeper and find other solutions no cat can think of."

"Are you saying that Birchpaw really is behind these attacks?" Leafpaw asked with hope.

The tom simply smiled. "I fear I do not have the answer to that question. However, if you do manage to prove it, then everyone will listen to you, including Pebblestar."

"But how do I gather more evidence? I can't just-"

Before her sentence was finished, everything went dark. Her mind was still left with a million questions. She opened her tired eyes, letting the sun flood her vision. Her nimble legs stretched out as she let out a yawn. 'If what my father said was true, I need to work harder to expose Birchpaw!' Leafpaw decided.

———

"Can you help me grab some catmint?" Robinpaw requested. "Those darn kits ate the whole stock again."

"Where can I find them?"

"Somewhere near SparkClan's border," Robinpaw explained.

Leafpaw traveled out of camp. Her eyes scanned the area as she tried to locate the herbs. She spotted a purple, tall plant underneath a large pile of snow. 'It's the catmint!' she thought. Quickly, she grabbed it off the ground.

However, before she could return to camp, something in the distance caught her eye - Birchpaw and Swiftstrike were walking in the snow. Leafpaw knew that she had to gather more evidence to convince Pebblestar that her theory was correct so she decided to follow the two cats silently.

She kept her body close to the ground and her paws carefully stepped into the soft snow. Birchpaw and Swiftstrike seemed to be having a conversation. All of the sudden, Birchpaw looked mad and he bared his teeth. The two cats disappeared behind some trees. Leafpaw could feel her heart beat faster as she watched in anticipation.

Not long after, a shriek was heard and it clearly came from Swiftstrike. 'Swiftstrike must be in danger! I bet Birchpaw's shredding him to pieces!' Leafpaw concluded. She rushed back to camp.

"Pebblestar! Pebblestar!" she called as she entered, completely out of breath. "Swiftstrike is being attacked!"

"What?"

"I heard him shrieking near SparkClan's border! We gotta hurry!"

Pebblestar looked at Skunktail and ordered, "Send a patrol as fast as you can. I'm coming with you."

Skunktail promptly organized a patrol to help Swiftstrike. A group of cats, including Pebblestar and Leafpaw, ran to Birchpaw and Swiftstrike's location. Swifstrike's shrieks were still loud and clear.

When the patrol finally found the two cats, they were in complete shock. Birchpaw had Swiftstrike pinned to the ground. They were both covered with scratches, however Swiftstrike seemed to suffer more wounds.

Murmurs of suspicion were spread across the patrol. They couldn't believe what they had just witnessed.

"Birchpaw! How dare you attack a senior warrior?" Swiftstrike questioned.

Birchpaw fell silent. "I d-didn't attack you. I just-"

Swifstrike shook Birchpaw off him and snarled. "We never should have accepted you into our Clan, you murderer!"

"What's going on?" Pebblestar asked.

"I was out hunting for prey and suddenly, I was attacked by this hound-heart!"

"Pebblestar, this is what I've been trying to tell you. Birchpaw's the cat behind these attacks!" Leafpaw chimed in.

Skunktail inquired, "The same attacks that have been plaguing our Clan for moons?"

Leafpaw nodded, shocking the whole patrol. "What shall we do about it Pebblestar?" one cat from the patrol asked.

"He should be killed immediately! He's taken too many lives!" another cat added.

Pebblestar stepped forward and declared, "When the sun rises tomorrow, Birchpaw shall be exiled for the murder and endangerment of our Clan mates. Skunktail, carry Swiftstrike to the medicine den so his wounds can be treated."

———

As Leafpaw entered camp, the whole Clan seemed to be caught up with gossip about Birchpaw. All she could hear was whispers among cats who tried to figure out what was going on.

"I never trusted Birchpaw! He always looks like he's up to something!"

"That kittypet never talks to anyone. I heard that one time, he scared off a kit who was playing with his tail."

"We shouldn't let anyone into our Clan so easily. Look at what happened!"

"He's only getting exiled? I'd rather see that kittypet get eaten by the bears."

'I guess no one's gonna miss him,' Leafpaw thought sadly. As glad as she was that Birchpaw was found guilty, she couldn't help but feel

slightly bad for him. It wasn't his choice to be born a kittypet after all.

"Birchpaw's getting exiled?" Owlpaw asked with excitement as he dashed to Leafpaw. Morningpaw was standing next to him with a shocked expression.

"I think so! He's the talk of the Clan now. Everyone's buzzing about his exile and they say he's leaving tomorrow," Morningpaw added.

Leafpaw confirmed, "Yeah, a patrol caught him trying to kill Swiftstrike! Now, Pebblestar finally believes our theory."

Owlpaw bounced with glee. "Great LightClan, this is good news! Our hard work has finally paid off!"

"*Your* hard work?" Silverpaw asked from inside the apprentices' den. "So are you three the cats who helped to remove Birchpaw from FrostClan?"

Leafpaw gloated, "Yep, you can thank us later."

"Why should I thank you? Birchpaw has been one of the nicest cats in this Clan and I can't believe you want him gone!"

"Silverpaw, he's a dangerous cat. If he stays, more of our Clanmates will be in danger and-"

"No, he's not a murderer. If you mouse-brains ever tried to get to know him, you'd know that he'd never even dare to hurt a fly. Unfortunately, you all turned your noses up instead of getting to know him better." Silverpaw exited the apprentices' den with a frown.

'Too bad Silverpaw and Birchpaw were close friends. If only she weren't so attached to him,' Leafpaw thought as she watched the silver she-cat leave.

A/N: I'M ALIIIIIIIIIIIIVE

As always, sorry for the super long wait for the update. In case y'all are wondering, I still love writing this story and these characters. School's

just been a huge pain in the butt so it really slows down my progress. Also, I'm planning to make three books in this series and one stand alone story based off of Nightpaw! Not sure how long that will take but I'll try my best to complete it. Happy holidays guys!

Chapter 18

"All cats who are old enough to hunt, gather around the high rock for a Clan meeting," Pebblestar announced.

The previous night had passed by in a flash. Leafpaw spent her time trying to sleep through the Clan's frantic meows. Although she fell asleep quickly, she still felt uneasy, as if something at the back of her mind was telling her that Birchpaw was innocent after all. No matter what she did, she couldn't shake off this feeling. 'If you mouse-brains ever tried to get to know him, you'd know that he'd never hurt a fly.' Silverpaw's words from the previous night burned in Leafpaw's head.

As Leafpaw stood beneath the high rock to witness Birchpaw's exile, her heart wrenched with guilt. She watched in despair, seeing Silverpaw whose eyes were filled with tears, her mouth twisting with frustration. Birchpaw appeared devastated as well. He stood right in front of the high rock, not even daring to look up. His tail slumped against his hind legs and his ears drooped down.

Leafpaw approached Silverpaw who was sitting in a quieter area of the camp. She whispered, "Silverpaw, I'm so sorry. I know he was your-"

"Close friend? Yeah, he was," Silverpaw responded in a monotone voice. "But I guess you wouldn't like the idea of me befriending a murderer. After all, he's so evil and mean and dangerous that he's the only cat I can truly confide in!" Her last sentence was laced with a mocking tone which annoyed Leafpaw terribly.

"Stop being sarcastic. Everyone in this Clan knows he's dangerous!"

"Oh really? Is he actually dangerous, or have you, Owlpaw, and Morningpaw been pointing your tails mindlessly at the lonely, mysterious cat who seems like an easy target?"

"We weren't pointing mindlessly; it literally took days for us to solve this case! We saw him attacking Swiftstrike!" Leafpaw tried her best to not blow up in front of her friend, knowing it would cause a scene.

"Did you actually *see* him attacking Swiftstrike? Have you ever seen him attacking anyone on purpose? Have you ever seen him intending to cause any harm?"

"No... no I have not." Leafpaw remembered Birchpaw's tendency to jump into battle without a second thought. 'Silverpaw has a point. He thinks with his claws rather than his mind.'

"Just admit it. You and your friends never even liked Birchpaw in the first place, didn't you? That's why it was so easy to put the blame on him."

Leafpaw blinked with confusion. "But he's a very suspicious cat and-"

"Answer my question. Did you ever like him in the first place? Did you ever try to befriend him? Did you ever stop to consider that maybe the reason why you think he's suspicious is because you can't look beyond his prickly skin? Or maybe you think he's untrustworthy because he used to be a kittypet?" Every question that spilled out of Silverpaw's mouth felt like claws scratching against Leafpaw's own neck.

"No, I did not." After a short pause, Leafpaw insisted, "But that doesn't change the fact that he's a threat."

"Stop accusing him!"

"Hey, what's going on here?" Doehoof asked as she walked towards the two apprentices. "Save your arguing for later, it looks like Pebblestar is almost ready with her decision. Is anything wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong, Doehoof," Silverpaw replied coldly. "Absolutely nothing." The gray she-cat moved to a spot where she could see Birchpaw better. All Leafpaw could do was frown in disappointment.

Pebblestar yelled, "We are gathered here today to exile Birchpaw who has been convicted of attacking and murdering our beloved Clanmates. Birchpaw, before you are exiled, would you like to say anything in your defense? If LightClan wills it, you may stay in this Clan. If LightClan says you are guilty, then you must leave immediately."

Birchpaw froze in front of the high rock. His light gray fur stood on its end and his claws dug into the ground. Afraid and puzzled, his amber eyes widened at the sight of the whole Clan waiting for his response. Every cat could see his heavy breathing due to the immense pressure from his Clan that weighed on him like a pile of boulders.

After a few moments of silence, Birchpaw defended boldly, "All I can say is that I'm not guilty. I have never attacked nor killed these cats. If you truly want me gone, then I'll gladly leave. I'm aware that most cats in this Clan would be better off without me."

Pebblestar nodded. "Cats of FrostClan!" she called. "All in favor of exiling Birchpaw, let out a yowl so our choice may be heard by LightClan and our ancestors!"

All cats of the Clan yowled in unison – except for Silverpaw. Her mouth was clasped shut unlike the others. Although Leafpaw was reluctant to follow at first, she eventually let out a yowl too.

"Thank you for your voice. The Clan has decided your fate, Birchpaw. You are never to step foot in FrostClan territory ever again. If any of our Clanmates catch you anywhere within our borders, we won't hesitate to use physical force. Do you understand?"

"Y-yes, Pebblestar." The exiled tom walked out of camp with his head lowered to the ground. As he walked sluggishly, cats hissed and scowled at him while making rude comments. Pebblestar ordered Skunktail and Littlefoot to escort him out of FrostClan territory.

Once the meeting was dismissed, Leafpaw grimaced at the snow-covered ground. Her earlier regrets haven't vanished and it left a

sore ache in her heart, as if prickly vines were slowly choking her.

"Leafpaw, what's the matter?" Doehoof asked gently while flicking her tail at the apprentice. "Birchpaw is exiled, which means our Clan is free of that pesky murderer! Aren't you glad? I heard from Skunktail that you, Morningpaw, and Owlpaw were the ones that solved the case. Great job on that, by the way."

"I don't know, honestly. A part of me feels glad that he's gone but there's a lingering voice in my mind that says I made the wrong choice."

"Why would you think that?"

Leafpaw shook her head. "I can't tell you that. It's too personal."

"I understand. Well, if it makes you feel better, I have an exciting new hunting strategy I want to show you today. It's been a part of FrostClan tradition for many moons!"

Leafpaw's head perked up. "Really?"

"Yeah, follow me. I know the perfect spot to teach you it."

———

"Tell me how the snow feels like in this clearing?" the mentor asked.

Leafpaw's mind wasn't focused on Doehoof's words. Her eyes were pinned to the ground. Unlike her usual excited energy while training, her motivation was completely drained, leaving her practically lifeless. The older she-cat quickly noticed her uncharacteristic negative behavior.

"Leafpaw? Hello, Leafpaw? Are you there?"

"W-what?" Leafpaw jumped. Once she realized Doehoof was the one who called her, she chuckled, "Yeah, I'm here. Just got a little distracted."

"I know you're feeling quite down today but that's no excuse to leave your responsibilities altogether. Now, as I was saying, how

does the snow feel like in this clearing?"

Leafpaw dug her paws into the white surface. Unlike the past few days, it felt fluffy. Her paws sunk into the layer of snow quickly. "It's quite soft."

"Leaf-bare is almost leaving, which means our task today will be easier to do. Now, show me your best efforts at digging through the ground."

Leafpaw's tiny paws burrowed through the snow swiftly. However, when she reached the soil beneath it, her claws could barely make a dent on its rock-hard exterior. Doehoof chuckled at the sight.

"The first question you should ask yourself is whether or not you smell any traces of prey nearby. Try sniffing the place you tried to dig into. Smell anything?"

Leafpaw inhaled deeply onto to find no scent of prey. She couldn't even catch a whiff of a rabbit. She shook her head while looking at her mentor.

"The goal of this hunting strategy is to find prey underneath the ground. Many prey like rabbits, voles, and mice burrow beneath the surface. The ground is always softer when they are nearby, so pay attention to where you dig. This strategy can be used during any season but it's very useful during leaf-bare when prey can become scarce. Some of our main sources of prey also enter deep sleep, meaning they sleep through the whole season in their burrows. Now, watch how I do it."

She unsheathed her claws as much as she could. Then, she lowered her nose to the ground, stopping only when she could smell her prey. Once she was certain, she leaped into the air, landed on her front paws, and started digging vigorously. Soon, she created a large enough hole for her to enter. After a while, she emerged out of the freshly dug soil with two hares in her mouth.

"That's amazing!" Leafpaw praised. "You said this strategy is an old tradition in FrostClan. Is that true?"

"Our ancestors did this trick too when the leaf-bare was getting too harsh to survive in. Leaf-bare is always the harshest in our Clan, it's in our Clan name after all. So, our ancestors used their own paws to plow into the ground to search for any prey who were well beneath the surface. At first, they dug small pits, deep enough to find any mice who were hiding temporarily. After many generations, our Clan became better at digging and we could dig tunnels large enough to fit an entire warrior in it!"

"Do the other Clans dig tunnels too?"

"They don't, only FrostClan knows the secret to good tunneling. Let me teach you how to do it!"

A/N: HEY GUYS ITS BEEN 3 MONTHS JEEZ

Super sorry for that long hiatus :,))) i somehow completely forgot that i havent updated in so long

Motivation said hi to me yesterday so i quickly finished this chapter whooooo!! This chapter was a blast to write btw

Hopefully social distancing will give me more time to write and HOPEFULLY I D ONT FORGET TO UPDATE AGAIN-

Chapter 19

Leafpaw devoted the rest of the day to trying to dig a decent tunnel. Despite all her efforts, the deepest hole she could dig was the size of a small hare. Being a usual fast learner, she had no idea why her efforts gave a result that's not half as impressive as she expected.

Throughout the whole training session, her mind wandered elsewhere. She couldn't silence her thoughts about Birchpaw. They flooded her mind like a rushing river. She hoped that by training, she could distract herself from these thoughts, but instead they grew louder than ever. Once sun-fall came, Doehoof stopped her.

"Leafpaw, it's getting late already. You haven't eaten anything since we started training," the mentor urged, her voice laced with concern. "We can train more tomorrow, now you need to go back."

Leafpaw reluctantly complied with her mentor's orders. She walked with a sluggish pace, her tail drooping downwards. Though flakes of snow entered her tired eyes, she didn't care. All she could focus on was her spiraling mind.

———

Days passed by in a blur for Leafpaw. Her doubts didn't cease to haunt her and Silverpaw's anger never died down. She kept telling herself something wasn't right with her investigation but she had no idea what it was.

"Leafy! There you are!" Owlpaw called cheerfully as Leafpaw entered the apprentices' den. "Where have you been?"

Leafpaw forced a smile. "Training, the usual."

"You sound worked out, did you spend the entire day chasing fish on the ground?" Leafpaw didn't answer, instead her eyes focused on her paws, her fur spiking up in uneasiness.

"Hey, hey, Leafy?" Owlpaw checked, sensing her lack of emotion. "Are you... alright?"

Shakily, Leafpaw sighed. "No, not really."

"But today is our triumphant day now that Birchpaw's gone! Or is something else bothering you? Wanna talk about it?" Leafpaw knew he wanted to help but his words only left a foul feeling in her heart.

"That's the thing, a voice in the back of my mind tells me that Birchpaw is innocent and that... I'm a monster for exiling him."

Owlpaw's ears stood up, his eyes blinking with confusion. "A monster? You're a hero! Without your help, we couldn't have cracked this case!"

"Am I really a hero? Now my best friend practically hates me for exposing Birchpaw."

"Your best friend? Wait..." Owlpaw paused to think. "Oh! You mean Silverpaw? C'mon, it's natural that she'd feel this way. She really likes Birchpaw after all. It's no surprise that she'd be mad at you for doing this."

"He means a lot to her, Owlpaw. I doubt she'd get over it in a few days."

"I know, I know. Just, get your head out of the clouds and remember that you did the right thing. If Birchpaw were still here, who knows how many more of our Clanmates would fall into his claws!"

"Owlpaw, do you think we, uh, judged him too harshly?"

"What do you mean?"

"We never really knew him that well. What if we pointed our paws mindlessly at him just because he seemed suspicious on the outside? What if there's more to him that we overlooked?"

"I don't think so. After all, the evidence leads to him. Did Silverpaw tell you that?"

"Well, maybe..."

"Don't take everything she says too seriously, she's going through a rough spot after all. I'd be as frustrated if I were in her position," Owlpaw advised with a soft, understanding gaze. He flicked his paw onto a half eaten dove and offered, "Wanna share? You look like a dead-beat squirrel!"

"Hey, I don't look like that!" Leafpaw blushed. "At least not *as* bad! I'll take the dove, though." The two apprentices burst out in laughter at the silly exchange.

———

Leafpaw's eyes opened slowly from her sleep. A soft glow surrounded her, glistening her light calico fur. Beyond the light, she couldn't see anything. She lifted her head curiously, wondering where she is. 'I must be in a dream!' she realized.

She wandered around the endless land. Unlike her usual vivid dreams, this one was practically empty. Her paws brought her nowhere no matter how far she walked.

"Leafpaw, I've been expecting you," a voice called from behind her.

Leafpaw smiled immediately when she recognized the voice. "Father! Why have you brought me here?"

"It's for a very obvious reason, my daughter."

Leafpaw was puzzled. "Obvious? I don't really have any problems lately."

"Oh, Leafpaw. Your bright, brilliant eyes look gloom. Are you sure nothing is troubling your heart?"

"Well, maybe. Maybe I successfully solved a murder and exiled the culprit but I-"

"Doubt your decision? Feel like the cat you drove away is innocent?"

'Woah, can he read minds?' Leafpaw thought. "Yes! That's exactly what I'm going through!"

The tom sat next to Leafpaw, wrapping his puffy tail around her. "You did well in solving the murder. Without your mind and hard work, FrostClan would have still been in danger."

"Thanks, but..." Leafpaw mewed, flattered. "Praises can't erase my doubts."

The tom nodded understandingly. "What's causing this doubt?"

"Well, first, there's the fact that Silverpaw is his best friend. She trusts him a lot and defended him more times than I can remember! Next, I have to admit that I've never tried to know him more in the first place. I rarely talk to him or even do anything with him. He looks scary on the outside but he may be innocent on the inside! Oh, father, am I being too judgmental? Did I overlook something? Please tell me!"

The tom calmed her down. "Leafpaw, Leafpaw, clear your mind. Silverpaw's trust in that cat doesn't change what he's done. The only reason why she's defending him is because he's her best friend."

"That... makes sense."

"To answer your other point, you need to remember that it's not a crime to know very little of Birchpaw. With his prickly exterior, it wouldn't be a surprise that you wouldn't want to approach him."

"Yes, yes, that's true."

"Lastly, don't forget the work you've done. He matches up with all the evidence you found, doesn't he? Try and remember all the data you gathered."

Leafpaw pondered for a few seconds. "Yes, yes, yes! When you put it that way, it seems like I was fretting over nothing. Thank you for, y'know, talking some sense into me, father."

"Of course, dear."

"Wait, but what do I do to convince Silverpaw?"

There was no answer.

"Father? Hello? Er, are you listening to me?"

The tom simply gave her a warm smile and left. No more words were uttered from his mouth. Darkness flooded Leafpaw's vision instantly once the tom was gone.

———

Leafpaw woke up in a state of shock. Her tired eyes scanned around the den, which was still full of sleeping apprentices and dark corners. 'The sun hasn't risen yet? That dream felt like an eternity!'

Pawsteps were heard on the crisp, thin snow outside the apprentices' den. The stranger noise alerted Leafpaw's sensitive ears. Through half-open eyes, she squinted at the den's entrance. All she could see was the silhouette of a young, lean cat who she instantly recognized as Silverpaw. 'What's she doing up this late?' she thought.

Silverpaw swiftly made her way out, sticking close to the camp's walls to hide in the shadows. Soon, she disappeared into the trees. Leafpaw followed after to see what the gray apprentice was planning. She kept her body low to the ground, making her steps as soft as possible.

Silverpaw's pelt glowed under the cold, shining moon as she stopped at a boulder near SparkClan's border. Leafpaw couldn't read her expression exactly, but her body language was impatient and worried, her tail swaying from side to side. After moments of silence, a large figure emerged from the darkness between the trees.

"Birchpaw! You're here!" Silverpaw greeted. Leafpaw quietly hissed at the name. 'What's he doing here?!' she thought.

Birchpaw grinned from ear to ear. His weary eyes beamed at the sight of his friend. "I told you I'd come. You're alone, right?"

"Of course I am. I figured out the quietest way to exit camp. Only a

rabbit can hear my pawsteps."

The two young cats climbed onto the boulder near them with ease. They sat on the top, their bodies close to each other and still. A purr rumbled in Silverpaw's throat. Even though Birchpaw had been gone for less than a day, she appeared to miss him terribly.

Silverpaw grimaced. "I can't believe all my Clanmates think you're guilty as if you're hiding something behind your tail. It's so frustrating! They make me want to rip my fur out!" She scratched at the hard, smooth surface of the boulder.

"Frankly, I don't care about what they think. Even if I stay, I doubt FrostClan would welcome me with open paws."

Silverpaw's whiskers started to twitch. "Don't care? *Don't care?* You should care!"

"Why should I? Look, Silverpaw, everyone treats me like I'm a piece of garbage."

"What about me? I like you! You're one of the best cats I've ever met in my life!"

"Everyone except you, of course. I'm glad I met you too. Unfortunately, now everyone thinks I'm a crazy, deranged murderer. Even the apprentices have given me dirty looks – especially Leafpaw, Owlpaw, and Morningpaw. They think I'm a murderer when I give them no reason to."

Leafpaw stared from behind the bushes, completely bewildered. "No reason to?" she hissed as she leaped out, revealing herself. "What are you doing on our territory, murderer?!"

Silverpaw and Birchpaw, alarmed by her presence, instantly leaped off the boulder. "Leafpaw, what are you doing here?" Silverpaw questioned. "Have you been stalking us?"

"What are *you* doing with Birchpaw?! He's a dangerous rogue!"

Silverpaw opened her mouth to speak only to be stopped by Birchpaw. "Leave her out of this, Leafpaw," he scowled, baring his

teeth, his fur starting to puff out.

"Leave her out of this? How about you leave FrostClan for good? C'mon Silverpaw, return with me to camp! I'm going to make sure Pebblestar knows about this!"

Leafpaw started to return, but Silverpaw didn't follow. As if her paws were locked to the ground, Silverpaw barely moved with a displeased look fixed on her face.

"Silverpaw, why aren't you following me?" Leafpaw yelled impatiently.

Silverpaw responded with an air of sternness, "The answer is plain and simple. I'm staying with Birchpaw."

"What? He's a murderer and you know it!"

"Leafpaw, how many times do I have to tell you this? He is completely innocent! Anything that happens to me is my own responsibility. Don't stick your nose into someone else's business."

"But I care about you! If anything bad happens, I wouldn't be able to forgive myself!"

Coldly, Silverpaw whispered, "If you really cared about me, you would've listened to me."

"Listen to you? You've never listened to me! You shouldn't put your trust in outsiders so easily anyway!"

Silverpaw gasped, taken aback by what her friend had just said. "What does him being a former kittypet have to do with anything?"

Leafpaw shifted uncomfortably. "I... I mean-"

"There are tons of outsiders in our Clan and there's no reason to distrust them. I don't see why it should be different for Birchpaw."

"I mean- ugh, you know what I mean! He's not like them!"

"So there's a *them* now?"

"Leafpaw, stop this," Birchpaw ordered. "If she doesn't want to, don't force her."

Seemingly ignoring Birchpaw, Leafpaw continued. "Please, Silverpaw, return to camp with me! You're not supposed to meet with him in the first place!"

"I said stop!" Birchpaw yowled before lunging at Leafpaw.

Leafpaw was pinned to the ground. Flakes of snow stung her eye, making her blink rapidly. She challenged, "What are you doing? Making me your next victim?"

Birchpaw's claws were still firm to the ground. His striking, amber eyes stared wildly at Leafpaw as he bared his large teeth.

"Birchpaw, let Leafpaw go!" Silverpaw cried. Her tone was assertive but slightly shaky, as if she was on the verge of tears. "Leafpaw, don't provoke him! He can't control his temper and you might get hurt!"

Birchpaw released Leafpaw from his grasp. He grumbled something under his breath as he slowly walked away. Unfortunately, Leafpaw wasn't satisfied. She instantly crouched to the ground, her face furious. Without warning, she jumped onto Birchpaw's back like a rabid fox, her claws unsheathed.

Birchpaw let out a painful cry. He shook off Leafpaw easily using his immense strength. Leafpaw didn't give up. She climbed onto a large tree and tackled her opponent once she jumped off.

Silverpaw stared in horror. She couldn't bare to witness both of her friends fighting each other. She tried to utter a cry in hopes of stopping them but she froze like a rock instead. Tears started to flood her eyes. It was too much for her to handle. The only thing she could do was watch how the scene would unfold.

(A/N: Leafpaw and Birchpaw are in kAHOOOOOOOOTS!!!!

As you probably can tell I took inspiration from that one scene in zootopia

This is a pretty long chapter,,, hope ya enjoy it :D)

Chapter 20

Leafpaw dug her unsheathed claws into Birchpaw's back. Her eyes were filled with fury. She couldn't stand the possibility of Silverpaw being in danger because of this criminal. She managed to pin Birchpaw to the cold, frosted ground.

Birchpaw kept struggling – this fight shouldn't be won so easily, especially after all he's been through. Using his hind legs, he kicked Leafpaw off of him, sending her into the air. With grace, she landed on her paws. She breathed heavily as she anticipated Birchpaw's next moves.

Birchpaw threw himself at the she-cat. He clawed at her and she clawed back in retaliation. They tussled vigorously in the snow. The two apprentices yowled and hissed as they shed blood.

Silverpaw couldn't tell what was happening at this point. She felt her throat tighten, causing her to gasp for air. Her heartbeat grew rapidly and she soon became lightheaded. She could feel pressure on her chest. Her paws tingled with a sensation of a thousand pines pricking into her skin. Powerless and confused, she ran back to camp.

"Silverpaw, wait!" Leafpaw called. She stopped clawing at her opponent in an instant. Before catching up to Silverpaw, she shot Birchpaw a dirty look and hissed, "I should've ripped you apart when I had the chance!"

Birchpaw panted heavily after being released from her claws. After gaining his balance, he growled in a low voice, "You can hurt me all you want, Leafpaw. You can claw me to shreds and I wouldn't mind at all. You can even kill me – as long as you never hurt Silverpaw."

"I would never. Unlike you would, murderer!"

Birchpaw resisted the urge to attack Leafpaw again. "Fine! Call me a

murderer! I could care less! But if you hurt as much as a whisker on her, you will pay for it. That includes her feelings."

Leafpaw clicked her tongue. "When have I ever done that?"

"I suppose this night is a good example, in case you haven't noticed." Birchpaw disappeared into the trees without waiting for a response.

Leafpaw stared blankly at the ground. She shook off flakes of snow that were stuck on her pelt and attempted to clear her mind. 'That mouse-brained murderer doesn't know what he's talking about. He's probably filled Silverpaw's head with lies already!' she thought.

———

Leafpaw made a speedy return to camp, hoping to get enough sleep for the next day. Judging from Silverpaw's absence as far as she could see, she assumed that the gray apprentice was in the apprentices' den. She tried to walk as softly as she could back to her own moss bed. Her paws lightly stepped on the ground in front of the medicine den only to wake up one of the cats inside.

Leafpaw quickly tried to hide herself under a dense bush. She could see a head perk out of the den. It was Nightpaw. The dark-colored she-cat had a hopeful look in her eyes.

"Sandclaw? Sandclaw? Is that you?" she stammered softly with a smile. "I knew you would come back for me!"

'I can't believe she still thinks her father is alive. It's been over a moon since her accident!' Leafpaw thought with pity.

Nightpaw caught the noise of Leafpaw rustling in the leaves. She sniffed the air and inspected the bush. When she discovered the source of the noise, her heart filled with disappointed.

"Oh, it's just you, Leafpaw," she sighed. "I should've known you weren't my father. Sandclaw has a different scent. What are you doing here anyway? And why are you covered in blood?"

Leafpaw stared at her with big eyes. "It's a long story and I would

rather, er, keep it a secret." She shuddered at the memory of Birchpaw digging his claws into her skin. "Can you please treat my wounds?"

"Treat your wounds? Do you think I'm a medicine cat?" Nightpaw's words sounded offended and harsh. "Just because I lost a leg it doesn't mean that I'll spend my days healing cats for the rest of my life."

"I'm so sorry! But, don't you know at least *some* basic medicine knowledge?" Suddenly, Leafpaw let out a whimper. "Ugh, I didn't realize how much my wounds stung until now."

Nightpaw paused for a few seconds then accepted. "Fine. I'll treat your wounds right next to the Stream Of Leaping Fish so we wake no one up. I'll grab the supplies in a moment."

———

As Nightpaw wrapped Leafpaw's wounds with cobwebs carefully, she informed, "I'm almost done. I just need to apply dock leaves."

"Woah, you're really good at this!" Leafpaw praised with amazement as she studied her covered up wounds.

Nightpaw chuckled. "Don't give me too much credit, this is really basic medicine cat stuff." She chewed up the dock leaves and applied it to Leafpaw's scratches. "Careful, this might sting but only for a moment."

Leafpaw's wounds stung even more than before. She bared her teeth at the fiery sensation. However, she quickly regained her composure and it seemed like the pain disappeared in an instant.

"It worked really well! If I may ask, are you officially a medicine cat apprentice now?"

Nightpaw shook her head. "Not exactly. Molestripe told me that Pebblestar is still intent on making me a medicine cat apprentice, but she wants to wait a little longer to announce it. My leg is still healing anyway so I can't continue my warrior training at the moment. Ironically enough, Robinpaw's the one who's excited to

train me."

"Robinpaw wants you to be a medicine cat? I thought he hated being a medicine cat himself! Every time I visit him in the den, he looks mad at everything."

"I was surprised too, he is a big grump after all," Nightpaw confessed. She wrapped her bushy tail around her legs. "He's actually really enthusiastic about healing cats. He's even memorized every single herb and remedy there is to know in the world. He's really pushing for me to be a medicine cat apprentice like him, even though I don't want to."

"Wait what? Didn't you tell me a while back that Molestripe was the one teaching basic medicine knowledge to you?"

"At first, yeah. Lately, though, he's become more understanding of my warrior aspirations so he's pretty much stopped training me. Robinpaw however? Let's just say he thinks I'm incapable of being a warrior just because of my leg." Nightpaw grimaced at her missing leg which was covered with deep scars. "How are your wounds? Are they feeling any better?"

"Yeah, they sting far less than before, thanks!" Nightpaw unwrapped the cobwebs and hurriedly returned to camp.

Leafpaw called, "Hold on, Nightpaw, I want to ask you something." The older apprentice stopped walking and turned her head. "I don't mean to offend you or anything but... why did you think I was Sandclaw?"

"He's still somewhere out there," Nightpaw answered, her tone starting to get defensive. "He's still alive."

"Alive? You sound so sure of yourself! Why is that?"

"Simple. Because I know he is." Nightpaw's voice started to slightly shake.

Leafpaw was completely puzzled. "How can you know for sure? He couldn't have possibly survived a badger attack! From what I've heard, those creatures are huge and dangerous!"

"W-we never found his body." Nightpaw swayed her head from side to side like a challenging snake. "Of course he's alive! Why wouldn't he- why wouldn't he be?" She dashed back to camp in a flash without another word.

Leafpaw was left in the snow. She shivered at the harsh cold. Knowing that calling Nightpaw would be no use, all she did was sigh. 'That cat is a load of work. If she doesn't have enough sense in her head, I doubt she can be a warrior – or even a medicine cat for that matter!' she thought.

Her eyes looked up towards the night sky. The stars glimmered brightly and she didn't realize that it was moon-high already. 'How long have I been out? I need to get back to camp now.'

As she took her first step, something between the bushes caught her eye. It looked like a large creature just passed swiftly right beside her. She instantly froze in her spot, her ears pricked up. She wondered what the creature was, but quickly brushed it off.

"It's probably just a mouse, Leafpaw. You don't have to be so paranoid," she told herself.

At a brisk pace, she padded back to camp. As she stepped away from the Stream Of Leaping Fish, a sudden force pushed her into the water. Claws locked onto her chest. Water sloshed and splashed around her. Sounds of the rushing current filled her ears while she gasped for air. She couldn't see who pushed her in but that didn't matter. Her only intent was to get out.

She tried her best to scream for help. But because of the lack of air, she could barely utter a single word. Her neck suffocated from the water. Her attacker was relentless, constantly pushing her deeper and deeper, showing no signs of mercy. She could feel her breath slowly slipping away.

'LightClan help me!'

A/N: Lmao leafpaws dead

I really want to update the cover especially since i've gotten better at

drawing realistic cats

But at the same time.....nah.....

Chapter 21

Water rushed into Leafpaw's throat. The apprentice could hardly gasp for air as her attacker tried to push her into the river further. Out of desperation, she started kicking violently using her hind legs. Like a rabid hare, she rapidly clawed at the attacker. She could hear it yowl in pain. Soon enough, the attacker loosened its grip and Leafpaw could wriggle out.

She emerged out of the water, breathing heavily and coughing. She shook freezing droplets of water off her fur as she glared at the mysterious attacker who was a light gray tabby tom. Before she could take a good look at him, he ran away into the forest. 'That must be Birchpaw! I knew that murderer would make me his next victim!' she thought with fury.

Leafpaw chased him persistently despite her injuries. The cold wind brushed against her damp pelt. She caught up to him after much effort. Pinning her attacker to the ground, she gritted her teeth. After her vision cleared up, she recognized him – but he wasn't Birchpaw after all.

"Swiftstrike?" she snarled. "Why did you drown me?!"

Swiftstrike growled at the apprentice. "That was you? I had no idea."

"Really? Then what *were* you doing there drowning a random cat?"

"I scented Birchpaw near the territory border during a patrol today. I saw you near the Stream Of Leaping Fish and without thinking any further, I tried to attack you, thinking you were him."

"I don't even look like him! Only a mouse would mistake me for him."

"Are you comparing me to prey? How dare you speak to a warrior

like that, especially one far older than you? Now, can you please get off of me?"

Leafpaw placed her paws off of the older warrior and sat down. She still could hardly believe his reasoning but decided not to question it any further. Her mind was too tired to argue even if she wanted to. 'Swiftstrike's a senior warrior anyway. Maybe he just jumps to conclusions like any elder would,' she justified.

Without another word escaping his mouth, Swiftstrike walked back to camp. Leafpaw shivered at what had just happened today. "This night is probably the weirdest one I'll ever have in moons!" she whispered to herself.

———

Sun-rise shone faintly into the apprentices den the next day. Leafpaw was still fast asleep in her moss bed unlike the other apprentices who were ready to take orders from their respective mentors. She slept at moon-high, meaning that she had gotten little time to

"Leafy? Hey, Leafy? C'mon, it's time to wake up," Owlpaw called softly. He nudged his muzzle onto her neck.

Leafpaw simply let out a grumble in response. Opening her droopy eyes, she yawned and stretched out her body. "Is it sun-rise already?" she slurred. "I barely got a blink of sleep last night."

"Any cat in the den can see that. Get up, you sleepy head! Doehoof's waiting for you!"

Leafpaw stretched her body and yawned groggily. She practically dragged herself outside the den. With a sluggish pace, she approached Doehoof who was standing next to Owlpaw and Featherstep near the camp entrance.

"Leafpaw," Doehoof informed. "Today you will undergo a hunting assessment with Owlpaw. Your task is to hunt for prey at the Stream Of Leaping Fish and its surroundings. Me and Featherstep will watch you two in secret."

Featherstep continued, "You will be judged based on your form, strategy, and stealth! Give us your best performance – this is one of the last stages of your apprentice training and you need to show us all you've got. Your assessment ends at sun-fall, so make sure you have enough prey by that time!"

Leafpaw, who was half listening, nodded understandingly. "Why is Owlpaw having his assessment *now*? He's a few moons older than me, isn't he?"

"Don't tell anyone but I secretly steal prey from SparkClan all the time. That's why my mentor wants to see whether I can actually hunt or not," Owlpaw whispered in a joking manner.

Featherstep scolded, "Owlpaw, stop acting like a kit! Don't worry, Leafpaw, he's just a bit of a slow poke. That's all." She smiled warmly at Leafpaw but instantly shot a cold look at Owlpaw afterwards. Owlpaw simply gave a mischievous grin in response.

———

'C'mon, focus. You need to focus, Leafpaw.'

Leafpaw's shivering paws settled into the snow. She could feel exhaustion take over her body. Her eyes felt like heavy stones, making it hard for them to stay open. Despite all that, she knows that she can't fail this assessment. 'Imagine what FrostClan would think of when the leader's daughter fails,' she thought. 'Doehoof might make me an apprentice for another 6 moons if that happens!'

Her nose caught a whiff of a rabbit nearby. She followed the scent, leading to the ground. Using the knowledge Doehoof had taught her, she leaped into the air, landed on her front paws, and dug into the snow with all the strength she had left over. Her claws scraped out the dirt lying beneath the snow. Unlike the day before, she seemed to be making progress, and she managed to dig a decent hole.

Her paws felt the dirt soften the deeper she went. Soon enough, she felt something hollow at the bottom. 'This must be a rabbit burrow!'

She entered the burrow without much further thought and hunted any rabbits she could find. Eventually, she managed to get one adult rabbit and two younger ones. With the prey she got, she tried to climb out of the hole. However, when her claws grabbed onto the walls, bits of dirt started breaking away. Before she could realize what was going on, the whole tunnel seemed to collapse right in front of her eyes. She froze in her spot, not knowing what to do.

When she thought the dirt would flood in completely, a cat grabbed her by the neck and pulled her out of the tunnel. She panted out of shock once she reached the surface. As she turned her head she realized that the cat who saved her was her own mentor. 'Well, this is embarrassing...'

"Leafpaw, are you alright?" Doehoof asked frantically. Leafpaw only nodded without uttering an answer.

Doehoof continued, "I've taught you how to dig without making the tunnel cave in. Did you forget our training yesterday?" Leafpaw shook her head.

"Fine, continue your assessment then. And don't forget what I taught you."

———

Sun-fall arrived on FrostClan territory. Leafpaw walked back to camp with the rabbits she got and a tiny mouse. Her posture was slouched and weary unlike Owlpaw who walked proudly with three large doves and two voles in his mouth. They added their prey to the fresh-kill pile and went to apprentices' den.

Leafpaw collapsed onto her moss bed upon entering. 'I'm never staying up late again!' she thought. 'Should I tell anyone about last night?'

She glanced around the den, trying to spot Morningpaw and Owlpaw. They were sharing a vole while chatting to each other. Leafpaw walked towards them and sat down.

"Leafpaw, you've looked so tired all day! And you're covered in so

much scars!" Owlpaw commented. "Did you even sleep last night?"

"I barely got any. I was awake until moon-high."

Morningpaw asked, "Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, oh my gosh, what were you doing?! Were you stealing prey? Did a bear attack you? Did you fight someone? What happened?!" He couldn't keep his excitement down as usual.

"Well, er... I can't tell you *everything* that happened." Leafpaw remembered her meeting with Silverpaw and Birchpaw. Certainly, Silverpaw wouldn't want anyone to know about it. "But there's this one part that really shocked me."

Owlpaw and Morningpaw leaned forward, perking up their ears. They were interested in what Leafpaw had to say. She continued, "I was at the Stream Of Leaping Fish and suddenly I was attacked by Swiftstrike. He tried to drown me there for no reason."

Morningpaw blinked sporadically. "Swiftstrike? He'd never do that! It must have been a misunderstanding!"

"Well, that's what he said. After fighting him off, I asked him why he tried to drown me, and he answered that he thought I was Birchpaw. "It was really odd."

"How is it odd? Maybe it was too dark and he couldn't see you!" Morningpaw's tone grew uncomfortable.

Owlpaw explained, "Leafpaw doesn't even look like Birchpaw and Swiftstrike acted so boldly out of nowhere. He never starts a fight mindlessly. Of course it's odd!"

Leafpaw whispered, "I don't want to jump to conclusions or anything but it is strange and dare I say quite suspicious."

"Swiftstrike would never hurt you on purpose! He just thought you were Birchpaw! Plus, he's a nice cat!" Morningpaw stated as his voice started to falter.

Owlpaw advised, "Morningpaw, just because he's nice to you doesn't mean he's nice to everyone. If Leafpaw *was* attacked by him

intentionally, you need to accept it."

"I'm getting sick. I think I have to go sleep now." Morningpaw shook his head and rushed to his moss bed, his thoughts overwhelming him.

Leafpaw sighed. "I forgot that Morningpaw practically worships Swiftstrike. I shouldn't have mentioned that in front of him!"

"It's okay, Leafy," Owlpaw reassured. "I get that he admires his mentor a lot but at this point it's quite concerning. I don't think he even realizes how unfair Swiftstrike is!"

"Unfair?"

"Haven't you noticed how he treats cats that aren't born in the Clans? It's as if they're nothing but crow food to him! When training his apprentices, he always praises Morningpaw but keeps on insulting Quailpaw just because he's not Clan-born."

"Wow, I've noticed him doing that, but I didn't realize how severe it really is." Leafpaw's tired mind tried to make sense of what had happened to her last night, but to no avail. She still couldn't understand why Swiftstrike attacked her like that. Suddenly, a thought popped into her head.

"Wait, speaking of cats born outside of the Clans, don't you think it's weird that the attacks only target cats that weren't born in FrostClan?" Leafpaw wondered. "Why would Birchpaw do that?"

"it could be a coincidence."

"Yeah, but it's too consistent to be a coincidence. Skunktail, Sundapple, Hawktalon, Littlefoot, Runningspirit, Quailpaw, Robinpaw – they were all born outsiders!" Leafpaw exclaimed.

"How would Birchpaw even know about their backstories? He barely talks to anyone. It still seems like a coincidence."

"Exactly. *How* would he know? We don't even know what his motivation was. Why would he kill random cats for fun? If he wanted something big like power, he would have targeted

Pebblestar."

"That does make a lick of sense. What does this all mean then?"

"Well, I think that someone is purposely trying to target cats who aren't born in the Clans. It wouldn't add up if Birchpaw is doing this. After all, he was a kittypet himself."

"A cat who hates outsiders? Are you saying that-"

"Swiftstrike is behind the attacks. Not Birchpaw," Leafpaw whispered to herself. A cold shiver ran through her body. The rest of the evidence lines up with this theory. According to her findings, the attacker is supposed to be a light-gray tabby with fast fighting skills. She recalled what had happened last night. Swiftstrike's movements were incredibly quick and stealthy. If Leafpaw hadn't fought him off, she could have easily died at that moment. The realization hit her like a rushing river and it sent a strong, prickling sensation through her body.

"Wait, what did you say?"

"Swiftstrike is behind the attacks. We were wrong all this time."

Owlpaw stared at Leafpaw, as if he was trying to connect all the evidence. "That does make sense! But didn't Swiftstrike get attacked by Birchpaw? And didn't he explain what happened to Runningspirit?"

"He must be lying. Think about it! He could have put the blame on Birchpaw to save himself. No one trusts Birchpaw anyway so he's instantly an easy target. Swifstrike also could have killed Runningspirit while faking a story to make himself seem innocent."

"No wonder he tried to drown you. Maybe he thought you were a threat to his plan since you figured out what happened so easily – too easily in fact!" Leafpaw nodded as her fur spiked up.

Owlpaw thought again. "This is all making so much sense," he commented. "We have to do something about it! Should we tell Morningpaw?"

"No, he'd be crushed if he finds out his mentor is a murderer!"

"He'll find out anyway, why wait?"

"I... I can't bear the thought of telling him myself. I think it's better to let him know once it's proven," Leafpaw sighed. 'Owlpaw's right, Morningpaw would have to face the truth sooner or later. If only he didn't idolize Swiftstrike so much,' she thought.

"Now that I think about it, neither can I. Well... sniff ya' later, Leafy! My eyes are so tired that they can hardly stay open."

As Leafpaw stood up to prepare her moss bed, she felt something watching her. Her fur shoulders tensed up. Her tail swung rapidly. Through the cracks of the apprentices' den, she thought she had seen two eyes staring at her. When she tried to take a better look, they disappeared instantly. Was her mind playing tricks on her or was she truly being watched? Her stomach tingled out of a mix of fear and uncertainty. She told herself it was nothing dangerous and plopped down on her moss bed, trying to fall asleep. Under the security of the den, she suddenly felt like vulnerable prey, ready to be hunted at any moment.

A/N: Sorry for the long wait u_u but this chapter is pretty long anyway so i guess that makes up for it

Whooooo I've been setting up this plot twist for quite some time!! I'm genuinely curious of whether this surprised anyone or not so feel free to comment your thoughts on it if you want

Also Morningpaw is my child i love him and i feel bad for hurting him in this chapter-

Chapter 22

Leafpaw woke up to the sound of icy gusts of winds. Standing up in her moss bed, she let out a huge yawn. Her senses had become increasingly wary because of last night's revelation. Every single sound, from a cracking twig to a hooting owl, seemed to make her jump. No matter what she did, she couldn't shake off the feeling of someone watching her. To take her mind off the problem, she took a mouse from the fresh-kill pile.

"Leafpaw! Swiftstrike said he wants to train you!" Morningpaw informed as Leafpaw was about to take her first bite.

She repeated shakily, "Swift-Swiftstrike?"

"You need to meet him at SparkClan's border before sun-high." Morningpaw paused for a few seconds. "Why are you looking at me like that? He'd never hurt you. You trust him, right? Right?"

"Well, er, yeah. Of course."

In an abrupt manner, Morningpaw left without saying another word. She gulped, thinking about why Swiftstrike was training her in the first place. Whatever the reason was, it's probably nothing good.

———

Leafpaw trotted to the location. Swiftstrike was standing on a cliff hanging off of SparkClan's mountain. The apprentice trekked all the way to the top.

"Swiftstrike?" Leafpaw quivered. "You... you wanted to see me?"

Swiftstrike's cold eyes glared down at her. He huffed, "Yes. Doehoof said your digging needs improvement."

A silence fell between the two cats. Leafpaw stood in her spot, not

moving at all. Her tail swayed from side to side uncomfortably and her eyes were wide open. Her whiskers twitched with dread.

"What are you waiting for?" Swiftstrike snapped. "Dig a hunting hole!"

Leafpaw crouched to the ground. She caught a whiff of a rabbit. Trembling, she leaped into the air and quickly dug into the soft dirt. Inside the ground, she found a small burrow which contained an adult rabbit inside. She emerged from her hole with her fresh-kill.

Swiftstrike looked at what she had caught with distaste in his eyes. "Not bad. I expected better, but not bad."

Leafpaw placed the rabbit on the ground next to her. She could feel Swiftstrike's cold stare as her knees shook. Her heart thumped so loudly that she could practically hear it ringing in her ears.

"Leafpaw, you are a very interesting cat," Swiftstrike observed.

Leafpaw lifted her head up instantly. "I... I am?"

"And a very clever one too. No normal cat, especially someone as young as you, could have solved Birchpaw's attacks."

"Oh, thank you." Leafpaw tried her hardest to avoid stuttering.

"But that is no surprise – I expected much from you. After all, you are the leader's daughter. I reckon everyone expects you to be as great as Pebblestar and it seems like you have just proven yourself."

Leafpaw didn't answer.

"Too bad the murderer got away too easily, though. He could still be somewhere out there."

"Y-yeah."

A silence fell between the two cats. Tension rose in Leafpaw's throat and her heart was tempted to call Swiftstrike out.

"I miss the old days when our Clan wasn't overrun with kittypets

and rogues. Look at where that brought us. FrostClan is better off without those cats with tainted blood, don't you agree?"

Leafpaw didn't answer again.

"You're awfully quiet."

Leafpaw couldn't keep it to herself any longer. She blurted out, "I know what you did!"

Swiftstrike glanced at her direction. "There's no need to tell me. I've learned that from your little talk last night. You are too clever."

Hearing those words, Leafpaw shuddered and instinctively unsheathed her claws. She crouched into an attacking stance. Resisting the urge to lunge herself at the warrior, she bared her teeth.

"Now calm down, you wouldn't want me to return to camp with wounds and scars, right?"

Leafpaw pinned the older warrior to the hard, frosted ground. She cried while digging her claws into her opponent, "I'd-I'd kill you! I'm not afraid of you! I'd even do it twice if I had to!"

"Do it then, rat. Run your claws against my throat and watch the blood pour out until my soul is with LightClan. What will you tell Pebblestar? That you killed an innocent warrior to solve a case that's already been solved?"

Leafpaw started to loosen her nerves. 'He has a point. I'd be exiled for sure and Birchpaw wouldn't get any justice,' she reflected. Her shoulders relaxed as she straightened her posture.

"Ah, so you *do* have a bit of common sense left. Well done."

"This doesn't change anything. I-I can still tell the whole Clan what happened."

"Oh really? I was hoping we could keep this meeting a secret."

"There's no way I'm doing that!"

Swiftstrike sighed while tilting his head. "That's a shame. If you can't keep your mouth shut then-"

"Then what? You'll maul me to death?"

"No, no, that'd be too easy. You can say goodbye to your friends. Owlpaw and Morningpaw know too much already."

Leafpaw's face paled. She'd give anything to bring justice to the Clan but she never expected anything like this. A growl rumbled in her throat as fury coursed through her mind. She knew she couldn't let Swiftstrike off the loose, yet she didn't want to sacrifice other cats, let alone her own friends.

Leafpaw gave in. "Fine, I won't tell anyone!"

"Good. If you say as much as a whisper of what just happened, you'll regret it until the rest of your days. I'm watching your every step so don't even think about it."

Leafpaw nodded her head in agreement. The tabby tom started to walk away but suddenly stopped. He looked back at Leafpaw and murmured, "And in case you were wondering, none of this was personal. You're a skilled apprentice who's full of potential. At the end of the day, though, you're in my way, and I've got no other choice."

Watching the warrior disappear into the trees, Leafpaw felt a strong sense of dread filling the air. She dipped her head to the ground in defeat. "Great LightClan, what will I do?" she sobbed to herself, tears flooding her eyes.

A/N: This chapter's shorter than usual but hope ya liked it!!

This is pretty much the last act of the story so there's gonna be only a few chapters left and it's finally finished wHOOOOOO (i still have tons of sequels planned tho)

@ Swiftstrike stop being racist smh shut up

Chapter 23

The season turned warmer as newleaf came, bringing an end to the harsh leaf-bare. Even though the snow melted away, Leafpaw's worries didn't. Her mind was plagued with constant reminders of Swiftstrike's looming presence. It felt as if he was watching every single thing she did. She couldn't spend a day without a great sense of dread twisting her stomach.

Leafpaw tried her best to keep her mind off of the problem. She attempted to focus her efforts into her upcoming assessments, but it was no use.

Every time she heard a twig cracking, she imagined Swiftstrike following close behind. Every time she sunk her teeth into a mouse, she imagined Swiftstrike tearing her open with his bare claws. Every time she looked at the Stream Of Leaping Fish, she imagined Swiftstrike drowning her under the rushing water. Keeping her mind at peace felt impossible.

Fortunately, there have been no recent attacks in the Clan. Despite the good news, to Leafpaw, it just worsened her anxieties. She fretted about what Swiftstrike was about to do next.

———

Leafpaw returned to camp with three large birds in her mouth after finishing her second hunting assessment. Due to the new season, more prey emerged from their hiding spots. Satisfied with the amount she caught, she placed them onto the fresh-kill pile.

"Well done, Leafpaw," Doehoof complimented brightly. "I see that your digging is far more stable than last time."

Leafpaw's pelt shimmered in response. "Thank you. Are there any other assessments I need to do?"

"Actually, you're almost ready for your warrior ceremony!"

Leafpaw's ears perked up. "My warrior ceremony?"

"Yes, you've completed your hunting, fighting, and border guard assessments with exceptional results these past few days. You only need one more assessment to complete."

"I can't believe it, it feels like I just became an apprentice yesterday," Leafpaw eyes lit up. Her sour mood slightly improved after hearing the news. "What's my last task?"

"A service assessment. You might think that the Clan can only be helped by doing big, impressive tasks like fighting off invaders and protecting our borders. On the contrary, simple things like watching kits and taking care of elders are also duties of a warrior."

Leafpaw groaned. "I thought only apprentices had to do that. Am I going to be picking ticks off of elders for the rest of my life?"

"I know, I know, it's not as grand as you expected. But look on the bright side, it's easier than finding a plump mouse in the middle of leaf-bare! Most of the time, apprentices take care of those kinds of tasks anyway. It won't be a regular thing for you to do once you become a warrior. I won't be watching you this time so you better be on your best behavior. I'll ask the elders and the queens to judge how well you've performed."

'Oh well, at least this assessment will keep my mind off Swiftstrike,' Leafpaw told herself, sighing.

———

After a long day at the elders' den, the last thing Leafpaw had to do was watch the kits. Her mouth was sore from picking out ticks for what seemed like forever. As she entered the nursery, a wave of warmth and familiarity hit her. It has been so long since she last stepped into this place. She still could recall where her old moss bed was and the kind of games she would play as a kit. Life was simpler back then.

A whiff of queen's milk and moss filled her nostrils when she came

inside. She noticed Blazekit and Sheepkit wrestling playfully. Leafpaw was pleasantly surprised to see how big they've grown. They've outgrown their own moss beds and they seem to be almost ready to be apprentices. The scene made her grow sentimental of when she was still a kit herself all those moons ago. She reminisced the moments where she got in trouble with Silverpaw without a care in the world. It seemed like her world had turned upside down since then.

"Leafpaw! It's been such a long time since I've seen ya' around these parts!" Foxtuft greeted, a purr rumbling in her throat. She approached Leafpaw and nudged her neck affectionately. "How are ya'?"

"I'm doing fine, Foxtuft. Wow, I didn't realize how long it's been since I've last went here. Blazekit and Sheepkit are so big now!"

"These lil' rascals are almost ready for their apprentice ceremony. They can hardly wait 'till they turn six moons old." Foxtuft gave Sheepkit and Blazekit a lick, interrupting their game.

"Aw c'mon, mom, I almost won!" Blazekit whined. "Do ya' need to be cleaning me now?" Sheepkit stuck his tongue out smugly in response.

"The more ya' play, the more cleaning ya' need, darling. Leafpaw, can you watch Sheepkit while I get water with Blazekit? It might take a while and I'm worried something bad might happen while I'm gone." Leafpaw accepted the request with a nod.

Watching Foxtuft leave the den with her kit, Leafpaw took a deep breath. It seemed that a part of her wariness had faded away. To her, the nursery was a sanctuary and she felt as if nothing could harm her within these walls.

Sheepkit suddenly looked at his surroundings rapidly, his head snapping from side to side. He gazed at the moon which had just risen, the moonlight shimmering on his thick, white fur. For no clear reason, he started stepping outside away from the nursery.

"Sheepkit? Where are you going?" Leafpaw asked while following

close behind.

Sheepkit stopped and answered, "Uh, I'm not supposed to tell you!"

Leafpaw was even more puzzled. "Wait what? Sheepkit, you aren't allowed to go anywhere outside the nursery at this hour."

The stubborn kit ignored her words and kept on walking. Without warning, he slipped through the cracks of the camp border without a trace in sight.

Frantic, Leafpaw cried, "Sheepkit! Sheepkit! Come back here!" She lowered her voice in order to prevent alerting her Clanmates.

She darted into the dark trees as her eyes examined the area. Since this was the denser part of the forest, it was hard for her to spot anything. Fortunately, Sheepkit's white fur stood out from his surroundings and it didn't take long for Leafpaw to find him.

"Have you got bees in your brain?" Leafpaw scolded while grabbing his scruff. "You could've gotten hurt! Foxtuft's gonna be so mad when she finds out you snuck out."

Sheepkit whispered, "Quiet down, he might hear you!"

"What are you even talking about? C'mon, let's get back. Bears might be awake at this time of the season."

"Let me go!" Sheepkit cried while struggling. Leafpaw released him. "I have some important things to do and you can't stop me. And stay quiet please."

"I don't have time for this. You need to be back to camp *now*."

"Yeah, yeah, just hold on. I already told you, I need to do this really important thing. It won't take long, I promise." Sheepkit started to continue walking towards his destination.

Leafpaw blocked his path. "Kits aren't allowed to be outside camp without an older supervisor."

"Great, then you can be my supervisor!"

"What I mean by an older supervisor is someone like a warrior or medicine cat. I'm too young to accompany you! Even if I were old enough, I wouldn't let you go outside the nursery."

Sheepkit complained, "Aw, that's a bummer. I guess I'll just go alone. See you later." He sprinted away immediately.

"Sheepkit, wait!" Leafpaw called while following behind.

Sheepkit's trail led to a spot near SparkClan's border, around a fallen rock. He scampered onto the top of it and waited eagerly, his tail swaying from side to side. Leafpaw decided to wait in the shade in case of an unforeseen threat. 'What's he doing now?' she wondered.

A cat emerged slowly emerged from the shadows and approached Sheepkit. It rasped, "You're finally here. I've been waiting for quite a while. What took you so long?"

Sheepkit retold, "I had to wait for Foxtuft to leave the nursery with Blazekit! Now, can we go do this special mission?"

"No one followed you, right?" Sheepkit shook his head in response. "Great, then we can begin now." It stepped into the moonlight, revealing itself to be...

"Swiftstrike! What's he doing here?!" Leafpaw exclaimed to herself, her tone shocked. She froze at her spot and crouched even lower. She had the urge to rush in and save Sheepkit but she clenched her mouth shut instead. Why would Swiftstrike want to meet Sheepkit in the first place? Whatever the reason is, it can't be good.

Instantly, a memory came back to her from when Sheepkit first entered FrostClan. Foxtuft had explained that he was a lost kittypet, meaning he wasn't Clan born. A shudder ran through her spine – Sheepkit was going to be Swiftstrike's next victim.

The tabby's striking eyes stared like a hungry snake ready to eat its prey. "Follow my lead. Your task is very simple. After doing it, I'm sure Pebblestar will make you a warrior instantly."

Sheepkit jumped excitedly. "Woah, really? Tell me what I need to

do!"

"Crouch like a predator hunting its prey and stay still."

"Like this?" Sheepkit asked as he dropped to the ground.

No answer came out of the senior warrior. His mouth curled into a grimace as he glared down at the kit, creating an air of uneasiness. The cheerful face on Sheepkit started to fade away, becoming increasingly worried.

"S... Swiftstrike? Am I doing it right?" he mewed softly.

Abruptly, Swiftstrike exposed his claws and slashed at the kit. Sheepkit let out a painful yowl. He tried to scurry away out of his hold but Swiftstrike grabbed him by the neck before he could slip away.

A rush of anger flooded Leafpaw's mind. She galloped to the top of the rock without hesitation, a growl rumbling in her throat. Without a second thought, she latched onto Swiftstrike's back. The warrior hissed in surprise. He instinctively shook Leafpaw off, slamming her to the ground. Meanwhile, Sheepkit laid limp on the ground next to the violent scene.

She quickly regained her balance, panting as she struggled to keep her knees steady. Fury flashed in her eyes. "Let him go!" she demanded.

"Filthy apprentice. You won't ever stop, will you?" Swiftstrike remarked. "I should've gotten rid of you when I had the chance."

He leaped onto Leafpaw and pinned her to the ground. The two cats scuffled on the rock's hard surface. Leafpaw slashed at his stomach with her hind legs, but he dodged the attack by soaring over her, landing with skillful grace. He gave the apprentice a slit on her shoulder, causing her to shriek and fall down

In order to divert Leafpaw's attention, Swiftstrike snatched Sheepkit by the back of his neck and flung him off the rock. A thud followed once he crashed into the forest floor. His body laid there almost lifelessly.

The sight horrified Leafpaw. Abandoning the battle, she hopped off the rock immediately. Her worried eyes scanned Sheepkit's body.

"No, no, no," she whispered with a shiver while licking the kit's wounds. Tears built up in her eyes.

This was the perfect moment for Swiftstrike to attack again, knowing that Leafpaw's mind was already overwhelmed. He launched himself onto the vulnerable she-cat. Right before he could land, a shadowy figure collided with him and completely threw him off his tracks. It knocked his entire body to the ground.

The sound of the sudden blow surprised Leafpaw. She whipped her head to see over her shoulder only to spot Swiftstrike laying beneath a lithe cat with dark fur.

Immediately recognizing the cat, Leafpaw shouted, "Nightpaw? What are you doing here?"

"Run back to camp now, Leafpaw. Call for help," Nightpaw ordered. She tussled as Swiftstrike attempted to strike at her stomach.

Leafpaw followed her words and grabbed Sheepkit. "What about you? Can you fight without your leg-"

"I can handle this, trust me! Go now!"

Without further questions, Leafpaw complied. She ran to camp with Sheepkit in her mouth as fast as lightning. Though her paws ached from the all the fighting, her courage kept her going.

She rushed to the fight with a patrol of cats. As they approached closer, they could hear sounds of screeching and claws scratching against soil. Once they were close enough, they jumped into the battle while baring their teeth, ready to attack. However, contrary to what any of them expected, they were greeted with the sight of Nightpaw standing with confidence in front of Swiftstrike's weakened body. He was still conscious, yet he could hardly get up.

"What happened here, Nightpaw?" Skunktail, one of the cats from the patrol, questioned.

Nightpaw reassured, "I'm fine, I'm fine. Swiftstrike's taken care of already."

"What did you do to him?" A hiss escaped from the deputy's throat.

"He was attacking Leafpaw so I fought him and-"

"Leafpaw, you said that Nightpaw was in danger. Is Swiftstrike the cat who did this? Why would he do this in the first place?"

Leafpaw froze at Skunktail's sudden anger. She reasoned, "It's a long story. Nightpaw did nothing wrong, she saved my life!"

"A long story, eh? I'd like to hear it then."

Leafpaw inhaled deeply. "Swiftstrike is behind the attacks in our Clan, not Birchpaw."

"I'm sorry, what?" Skunktail blinked in disbelief.

"I'll explain it back at camp. Right now, we need to make sure Sheepkit and Nightpaw are tended to."

Though Skunktail was initially skeptical, she dipped her head understandingly. She ordered the patrol to return to camp while carrying Swiftstrike. Leafpaw and Nightpaw followed behind.

Leafpaw marveled, "Nightpaw, you fought amazingly back there! Thanks for, y'know, saving me. I think I would've turned into bear food if you didn't come."

"There's no need to thank me. I'm just doing what any good Clanmate would do."

"Sorry for doubting you earlier too, I shouldn't have underestimated you. You fight as well as any warrior!"

"R-really?" Nightpaw's amber eyes widened.

"Yeah, no average cat can defeat Swiftstrike in a battle so easily! How did you manage to do that?"

"I have to thank Robinpaw for that. I remembered him talking about holly berries in the middle of his medicine lessons. Out of every herb he mentioned, those were the ones that really stuck with me."

"Holly berries? Aren't those poisonous? Foxtuft told me not to go near them when I was a kit!"

"They're poisonous to kits but only give light side effects adults when eaten in small amounts. Near the end of my fight with Swiftstrike, I shoved a berry down his mouth. One was enough to weaken him, and the patrol came immediately after its effects took over."

"Woah, you could fight him without your back leg?"

"It's not that different from fighting with four legs, honestly. It's harder to keep my balance but I managed to adapt to it quickly."

Leafpaw was thoroughly impressed. 'That's incredible! I never expected her to pull that off,' she thought.

A/N: Super long chapter aw ye!!

Dang Leafpaw.....Nightpaw literally saved your butt and the first thing you said to her is "YO ISN'T YOUR BACK LEG MISSING?????" like honey shut up

Jk i love u leafpaw

Chapter 24

"All cats who are old enough to catch their own prey, gather around the high rock for a Clan meeting!" Pebblestar called with an ear-splitting yowl.

Everyone in the Clan shuffled uncomfortably. A strong air of anxiety filled their heads. The sun shone down brightly on their faces. They gathered around the high rock, eager to watch the meeting. Swiftstrike stood right in the middle, facing Pebblestar with a bold grimace.

"Today, we are gathered to exile Swiftstrike who has been convicted of attacking our beloved Clanmates," Pebblestar continued. "Swiftstrike, before you are exiled, would you like to defend yourself and your actions? If LightClan wills it, you may stay in this Clan. If LightClan deems you guilty, then you must leave immediately."

All eyes were locked on Swiftstrike. They stared at the senior warrior, eagerly waiting for an answer. Soon, he opened his mouth to speak.

"I have nothing to say in my defense. Yes, I am guilty," Swiftstrike scoffed as he lifted his head to the sky. Shocked gasps and murmurs spread through the audience.

Pebblestar closed her eyes understandingly. "Very well, Swiftstrike. Cats of FrostClan-"

"I would like to provide a justification, if I may." Pebblestar hesitated at first, but eventually nodded. Swiftstrike rasped, "FrostClan! My Clanmates, my friends, my brothers and sisters! How did we let our Clan blood be tainted?"

"What exactly do you mean?"

"You *know* what I mean, Pebblestar. I'm sure everyone here knows! We, as a Clan, have brought shame to our ancestors by softening up to kittypets, rogues, and loners! Yes, I am behind these attacks, but am I doing the wrong thing for protecting FrostClan from these parasites?"

Cats who were born outside FrostClan bared their teeth at those words. Meanwhile, the Clan-born cats looked more nervous than outraged. Some even whispered in agreement.

Swiftstrike continued, "I'm doing a favor for all of you, but it's a real pity that none of you saw it that way. Therefore, I will gladly be exiled. What's the point of being in a Clan if they're overrun by outsiders?"

"Is there anything else you want to say?"

Swiftstrike flicked his tail. "No. Nothing else. I'm sure I don't need to say much to get my point across. If any of you here had half the brain of a mouse, you'd know whether I'm right."

"Cats of FrostClan! All in favor of exiling Swiftstrike, let out a yowl so our choice may be heard by LightClan and our ancestors!"

A large crowd of cats yowled. A few simply kept their mouths shut, unsure of what to do. They exchanged confused glances with each other as their fur pricked up with uncertainty. However, the majority has expressed their approval.

"Thank you for your voice," Pebblestar thanked. "The Clan has decided your fate, Swiftstrike. You are never to step foot in FrostClan territory ever again. If any of our Clanmates catch you anywhere within our borders, we won't hesitate to use physical force. Do you understand?"

Swiftstrike didn't utter a word. He squinted his gray eyes at the leader, whipped his head around, and walked away with the pace of a fox. He puffed out his chest and lifted his chin, as if he didn't carry the weight of his actions. Pebblestar ordered Skunktail and Featherstep to escort him out of FrostClan territory. Confused and somber mews were heard.

Leafpaw watched the scene unfold from the audience. 'Pebblestar's letting him go that easily? He could easily attack more of us!' she thought.

"To replace Swiftstrike's mentorship, Morningpaw will be training under Stormrunner and Quailpaw will be training under Doehoof," Pebblestar announced. "I will organize a search patrol to find Birchpaw. If he accepts, he can join our Clan again and resume his apprentice training."

Silverpaw looked upon Pebblestar with hopeful eyes, grateful that her friend could finally return.

"Moving on, we have exciting news. FrostClan will be welcoming a new warrior. Nightpaw, you have proven yourself to be a resilient, strategic apprentice. Despite your missing leg, you are as skilled as any great warrior and even defeated Swiftstrike in battle."

Nightpaw stepped in front of the high rock, her dark pelt shimmering with pride. Her tail swayed impatiently, as if she couldn't wait any longer.

"Nightpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code even at the cost of your life?"

"I do."

"From this day on, you shall be named Nightshade for your stealth and swiftness in fighting. LightClan, may you guide this warrior on her path."

"Nightshade! Nightshade! Nightshade!" the Clan called in unison. Though their voices sounded worn out from Swiftstrike's exile, they still cheered gleefully. Nightshade's face beamed in response.

Pebblestar ordered, "The last thing you need to complete to become a full warrior is to swim in the Stream Of Leaping Fish until sun-high to ensure that LightClan accepts your journey to a new stage of life. I would like to ask Snowbreeze to accompany her as she completes this task." The leader stepped down from the high rock.

The apprentices gathered around the new warrior. "Congratulations,

Nightpaw- I mean Nightshade!" Leafpaw congratulated.

"Thanks a bunch," Nightshade replied. "Everyone's got a sour mood, eh?"

"Yeah, it's not a surprise. The exile must've been hard to process." Leafpaw didn't want to admit it, but the exile left a dreadful feeling in her heart since she was afraid that Swiftstrike might return.

"It's quite a bummer. But hey, at least I'm a warrior now. It doesn't matter to me that everyone else is having a bad day."

"C'mon, we need to get to the Stream Of Leaping Fish now!" Snowbreeze urged. "You're not an apprentice anymore, remember? You can't delay your duties." Nightshade left camp promptly with a satisfied purr rumbling in her throat.

———

With wary eyes, Leafpaw watched the movement of the grass between the trees, trying to spot anything out of place. She paced around, her knees trembling, like a rabbit that knows it's being hunted. Every single rustle in the bushes set off a warning in her mind. Even though Swiftstrike had been exiled a few days ago, she couldn't shake off the feeling that he might come back, ready to kill another cat.

She caught the movement of a mouse as it darted through the forest floor. As she stalked it, she noticed another, far larger creature lurking nearby. She dropped to a defensive crouch in an instant.

'Stop acting paranoid, Leafpaw, it's probably nothing,' she told herself.

When the mouse stopped moving, she lunged at it with unsheathed claws. However, as she grasped it, a heavy weight crashed into her. Without thinking any further, she rushed off, scared that whatever hit her might be a threat.

"Leafpaw, wait!" a voice called.

Leafpaw stopped her tracks and turned around only to see

Birchpaw. "Oh, it's just you."

"Sorry for interrupting your hunt. We must've been stalking the same mouse before."

"It's fine, really!"

"Are you on a... a hunting mission?"

"Yeah. And you?"

"Same task for me."

"Oh, cool!" Leafpaw forced a smile as she stared at the tabby. He looked terribly thin and ragged, supposedly from being exiled. 'He must've been in danger out there alone and it's all my fault...'

Birchpaw started to walk away. He uttered with an awkward tone, "Well, I better be going now-"

"Hey! Birchpaw, before you go! I want to say that I'm... sorry."

Birchpaw paused and looked back. "Hm?"

"I'm sorry for accusing you of something you didn't do. I know, I know, I was such a bird-brain! Silverpaw was right, I was making assumptions just because you used to be a kittypet. Even if you're back now and the Clan welcomes you, the damage I did can't be undone. I'm really, really sorry, and it's alright if you don't forgive me!"

"Don't worry, I forgive you. I'm sorry too for acting recklessly when you caught me meeting up with Silverpaw."

"Can we start over? Maybe be friends?"

Birchpaw thought for a moment. "I don't think I'm ready to be friends with you yet after, y'know, everything that happened. But it's a start." He gave a warm smile and left promptly. Leafpaw smiled back with a sigh of relief and continued to hunt for prey.

———

Leafpaw entered camp with a few plump mice in her mouth and placed them in the fresh-kill pile. Immediately, she noticed a lot of worried looks among her Clanmates. A small crowd of cats were huddled in the medicine den. All she could hear was distressed murmurs.

"What's this all about?" Leafpaw whispered to herself.

She padded to the medicine den. Inside, cats were asking frantic questions. A small cat was lying on top of a moss bed, heavily injured and scarred. Once Leafpaw recognized who it was, her knees went weak.

"Morningpaw! No, no, no, this can't be happening!" she cried. "What happened to him?"

Robinpaw answered, "We don't know. A patrol found him near our borders. At first it seemed like a bear attack, but the claw marks are far too small."

"Is- is he okay?"

"Me and Molestripe have been treating his wounds but ever since he was found, he's been unconscious."

Everyone in the medicine den waited for Morningpaw to wake up. After Molestripe fed him a herb, he jolted up and started coughing. He looked around, confused. The audience immediately flooded him with questions, but Molestripe silenced them to avoid confusing him.

"Ugh, what happened?" Morningpaw slurred.

Molestripe replied, "A patrol found you outside camp. You were unconscious and injured. How do your wounds feel?"

"Ouch, they sting a lot." Morningpaw winced at the burning sensation.

"Do you remember anything?"

Morningpaw tried to recall past events. Once he remembered, his

eyes widened in shock. "It was Swiftstrike! I was attacked by Swiftstrike! I was getting water for the elders and he ambushed me!"

Leafpaw's blood ran cold. Her worst fears have been confirmed right in front of her. A chill ran down her spine, her eyes on the verge of tears.

Swiftstrike's words echoed in her mind. 'You can say goodbye to your friends. Owlpaw and Morningpaw know too much already.'

Overwhelmed, she ran away to the apprentices' den which was, to her dismay, still empty. She buried herself in her moss bed, trying to drown out the thoughts in her head. Her claws gripped at the hard soil beneath her.

A paw touched her shoulder, causing her to jump. She whipped her head around and saw Owlpaw who was wearing a concerned expression.

"Leafy, are you alright?" he whispered in a tender tone.

Leafpaw fretted, "Owlpaw! Thank LightClan you're here! Are you hurt? Did anything bad happen to you?"

"Woah, woah, woah, what's going on?"

"Answer me please!"

"I'm fine, I just got back from an assessment. What's going on?"

"Are-are you sure you're fine?"

"Really, I'm fine! Is anything wrong?"

Leafpaw looked away without answering.

Owlpaw plopped down beside her. "Leafy?"

After inhaling sharply, Leafpaw quivered, "Morningpaw was attacked."

"Wait what? Is that why everyone's huddled in the medicine den?"

"Yes. Thankfully, he's fine now, but the cat who attacked him was... was S-Swiftstrike."

Owlpaw hissed at the murderer's name, "That scoundrel! Why would he attack Morningpaw?"

"I haven't told you, haven't I?"

"Told me what?"

"Before he was proven guilty, he didn't want me telling everyone about what he did. So, he threatened me."

"Threatened you? To do what?"

"He said that h- he'll kill you and Morningpaw if I told anyone about the truth."

"What a dog-heart! I'll tear him to shreds the next time I see him!"

"Owlpaw, we need to do something about him. Otherwise, more cats will fall victim to him."

"What else can we do? Isn't Pebblestar already handling the situation by increasing patrols?"

"It's not enough. If Swiftstrike can attack Morningpaw without a trace, that means patrols won't stop him. We need to handle him directly and I doubt Pebblestar would dare to do that."

"Well, what are you thinking of doing then?"

Leafpaw pondered the questioned silently. "I need to deal with him face-to-face."

"Hold on... Do you mean-"

"I've going to find him and kill him," Leafpaw declared, her voice laced with fury and determination.

"Wait, you can't be serious, right?"

"What makes you think so? I'm not joking, Owlpaw."

"It just, I don't know, it sounds too risky! Especially for someone who's only an apprentice!"

"I know it sounds pretty ridiculous, even to me it does. But I can't let him get away with it. He hurt Morningpaw already. Imagine how many of our Clanmates might get hurt too."

"I can't say I disagree with killing him off. But, don't you think it'll be safer if we let Pebblestar and the warriors do it?"

"How many times do I have to tell you? Pebblestar's not a cat of action! All she does is pretend to deal with the issue but she never tries to actually solve it!"

"But Leafy... what about you?"

"What do you mean?"

"What if he hurts you? What if you don't return after the fight?"

Leafpaw shuddered at the possibility. "That's my own responsibility. Plus, I'll do anything to get rid of him."

"Are you sure? I can't bear the thought of losing you." Owlpaw exhaled sadly while looking at the ground.

Leafpaw's face warmed up as she heard those words. "You won't. I'll find a way to make it out alive. A few scratches never hurt me after all!" she promised. She stretched and let out a huge yawn as she prepared to go to sleep.

"Hey, can I share a moss bed with you? Before you, uh, leave..."

"Aw, look who's growing into a big softie!"

"Softie? Look who you're talking to! I'm no softie!"

"Whatever you say, mouse-brain."

"Is that a yes?"

"Obviously. Get in here you huge lump of fur!" Leafpaw scooted to the side of her moss bed in order to make more room.

Owlpaw grumbled playfully and laid down. The two apprentices laughed at the exchange like squawking birds. Leafpaw's whiskers, which previously twitched with anxiety, had calmed down soon after. With her mind more at ease than before, it didn't take long for her to fall asleep.

(A/N: Leafpaw prepares to commit arson

Oooo this chapter's pretty clunky but hope ya liked it!! I kinda rushed it since i haven't updated in a while)

Chapter 25

A strong gust of wind blew in Leafpaw's direction, ruffling her whiskers and rustling her fur. She jumped in a startle from her slumber. Darkness flooded her vision, turning everything pitch black. Even though she had no idea about what was happening, a strong sense of danger loomed over her.

In desperation, she used her other senses. Her nose sniffed the air and she caught the scent of fresh blood mixed with dirt. The sounds of claws scraping against the ground filled her ears. A sudden fiery sensation shot through her body, starting from her paws up until the tip of her head. She let out a hiss of pain and flailed her legs wildly.

"Who's there? I'm not afraid of you!" Leafpaw challenged, panting.

Only silence answered her.

"Show yourself!"

A glowing cat emerged from the darkness. A low voice growled, "Leafpaw, what do you think you're doing?!" Its words boomed and shook the ground.

Before Leafpaw could process what was happening, she felt the floor beneath her crack and open up, causing her to fall into the abyss.

She woke up with a jolt, her whole body snapping up from her moss bed. After observing her surroundings, which was only a den full of sleeping apprentices, she stopped panting heavily. Yet, her heart continued to pound wildly. 'It's just a nightmare, Leafpaw. A nightmare. Nothing more,' she told herself in an effort to calm herself. 'But what could it mean? Is it an omen?'

Glancing down, she spotted Owlpaw still asleep right next to her.

His red fur rose and fell to the rhythm of his breathing. It gave her slight comfort, reminding her that she won't go through this alone.

———

"Are you ready?" Owlpaw asked with concern in his voice.

Leafpaw chuckled, "For the millionth time, I am!"

Owlpaw frowned softly. "Alright, I'm just making sure."

"Don't worry about me. I'll be fine. Do you have the traveling herbs?"

"Here." Owlpaw carried the bundle of herbs in his mouth and laid them on the ground. Leafpaw chewed it quickly in order to let the bitter taste pass by quickly. She winced afterwards in disgust.

"This tastes like crow food! How did you manage to get it anyway? Robinpaw and Molestripe never leave the medicine den."

"I have my sources," Owlpaw replied smugly with a wink.

"You sly fox!" Leafpaw gazed at the camp's exit. The dark crevices and corners between the trees sent a shiver down her spine. She wondered if she could face what lied ahead of her.

"Hey, are you alright?"

"Yeah, yeah," Leafpaw reassured, shaking herself. "I... I guess it's time for me to go now-"

"Wait! Can I ask you something?"

"Is this a reason to have me around longer?" the she-cat chuckled. "The sun's almost rising Owlpaw, you know I can't stay forever."

"N-no, I was, er, just wondering. Why are you so determined on beating Swiftstrike? You're risking so much even though plenty of cats can do the same."

"You already know why. Pebblestar's lack of action and all."

"I know but... is there another reason? No normal cat would act that way."

"Another reason?" Leafpaw pondered for a moment while looking down at her paws. With a pang of sadness, she mewed, "I guess I want to prove myself to everyone."

"What do you need to prove? All of FrostClan knows you'd be a great warrior!"

"It's a bit more complicated than that. No matter how many prey I catch, no matter how many cats I defeat in battle, no matter how many cases I solve, I'm always in the shadow of my mother. It's like chasing endless mice and I'm sick of it!"

Owlpaw didn't utter an answer. He stared at Leafpaw with eyes full of pity.

"Whenever cats look at me, they always see what I should be, not what I am. If I mess up, they scold me for being a bad example of the leader's daughter. If I perform well, they aren't surprised or proud because that's just how they have always seen me."

"Are you really sure that doing this will change their minds? You can't just, y'know, *not* be Pebblestar's daughter."

"Maybe not, but, hopefully it will be a start," Leafpaw declared, her voice full of confidence.

Owlpaw let out a disappointed sigh. "It's time for you to go then, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Bye, Owlpaw!"

"Bye, Leafy!"

The two apprentices pressed their foreheads against each other before parting. A tender emotion filled the air. It was not a sad or happy one. It told them both that things would get better.

———

The soft grass rustled beneath Leafpaw's feet. The sun had just risen, filling the forest with faint rays of light. Though the herbs kept her from hunger and exhaustion, she was starting to get tired. She had trekked a fairly long distance, following Swiftstrike's scent which was disguised with fox dung. It led her beyond FrostClan's borders, or perhaps, beyond the borders of any other Clan.

As she approached a grand mountain, possibly one of SparkClan's, she spotted a small pile of bear dung. Wincing at the smell, she realized that someone might notice her. She promptly smeared it on her fur. 'Yuck! This is gross!' she complained to herself. 'This thing better keep me safe!'

Her journey spanned until the sun disappeared completely. Swiftstrike's scent began to fade away. She sniffed the air desperately as she quickened her pace. Time was running out and she could only hope that fate would treat her kindly.

Something on the ground caught her eye. It was a half-eaten mouse laying on the floor with fresh paw prints next to it. She couldn't smell any scent that belonged to a Clan cat. Her eyes widened with glee. 'I think I finally found him!'

She followed the paw prints all the way to a tiny cave in the middle of a clearing. Trees that had been cut down surrounded the area. Contrasting the usual lushness of the forest, this place was barren and empty. An uneasy emotion filled Leafpaw's mind.

Swiftstrike emerged from the cave. He wore an irritated expression, baring his teeth at the apprentice. Leafpaw immediately dropped into a fighting crouch.

"I didn't expect you to come here," he scoffed. "But I always knew you're too foolish to quit."

A/N: I took a mini break to focus on school so apologies for the delay!!!

I'm a sucker for writing leafpaw and owlpaw scenes.. i love this duo so much.....

Chapter 26

Leafpaw's fur flashed with anger. She sprinted towards Swiftstrike's direction with the ferociousness of a rabid fox. The lean tabby was barely fazed by this move. He immediately moved over to the side, grabbing Leafpaw by the back of her neck and flinging her to the harsh, coarse dirt. Leafpaw wheezed in pain as she struggled to stand back up.

"Giving up?" Swiftstrike growled.

Leafpaw declared with a weak rasp, "Never. Never in a million moons. Not until you're dead."

"Aw, what an honorable act of heroism." Swiftstrike let out a cold cackle. "I'm sure your Clanmates will be proud when they find your dead body."

"I'm not scared of dying! Especially if it means no one has to see your rotten face again!" Leafpaw slowly got up and swiped her claws at her opponent. Again, Swiftstrike had predicted her moves, so she completely missed.

"I don't want to fight you, Leafpaw. Let's resolve this like proper cats – with words. After you hear what I have to say, you would know my intentions are anything but malicious if you're smarter than a rat."

Ignoring the offer, Leafpaw lunged herself at Swiftstrike. She managed to pin him to the ground, however, the senior warrior raked her belly in response. It sent Leafpaw running away as she yowled in pain.

Swiftstrike hissed, "Listen, apprentice! All this useless fighting will only end in your defeat and you know it!"

Leafpaw refused to stop, fueled with determination. The apprentice

latched herself onto Swiftstrike's back while biting down on his neck. Effortlessly, Swiftstrike shook her off. She fell to the ground with a thump.

"What are you going to do now? Tackle me again like a kit?"

Although she desperately tried to get back up, Leafpaw realized she barely had the strength to do so. She had barely eaten during her journey and the effects of her traveling herbs were beginning to wear off. With no other choice, she sighed in defeat, letting her body fall down.

"Fine, you got me. What do you want to say?"

"Finally you've come to your senses-"

"Cut the small talk and get to the point!"

Swiftstrike flinched at the apprentice's boldness, then continued, "You love your Clan, Leafpaw, don't you?"

"Of course. I've worked my whole life to protect it."

"Then why are you trying to stop me?"

"Cats have suffered because of you! You've literally killed and attacked your own Clanmates just because they aren't Clan-born! You even tried to kill your own apprentices!"

"It's a shame you feel that way. I'm simply fixing FrostClan."

"FrostClan is perfect the way it is. You're the one tearing it apart."

"You call a Clan filled to the brim with outsiders perfect? If the founder of the Clans could see what FrostClan has become, they'd be disgusted. Just like you, what I've done all this time is protect it."

"Protect it? That's mouse-brained. You're nothing but a filthy traitor."

"A traitor to what exactly?"

"Your own Clan and what it means to be a warrior. A real warrior protects all their Clanmates, Clan-born or not!"

Swiftstrike roared with laughter. "Oh my- you actually think that- you must be joking! I bet you don't even know the first word of the Warrior Code!"

"What about it? Doehoof told me she'll teach me it when my warrior ceremony is near."

"Mentors these days... always teaching their apprentices the Warrior Code during the last days of training. No wonder you're so naive."

"What does the Warrior Code have to do with all this?"

"Everything, actually. Would you like me to recite it to you?"

"I don't see why not."

"Alright. 1. Be loyal to the Clan you were born to first and foremost, 2. Your duty is to serve, protect, and defend the Clan, 3. All four Clans must hold a truce during a gathering, 4. The Clan should not question the decisions of a leader, 5. In every single thing you do, be grateful to LightClan and your ancestors, 6. Taking the life of another cat, when deemed unnecessary, is prohibited, 7. A tom belongs to his she-cat, a she-cat belongs to her tom." Swiftstrike paused momentarily, then finished, "Lastly, 8. Those outside of your Clan have no place within your Clan."

The last rule of the code sent a wave of shock down Leafpaw's spine. Was Swiftstrike right to attack those cats? 'He can't be! He's harming those who are innocent!' she thought. 'But, what if he has a point? What if he really was doing his duty as a warrior?'

"I see you're surprised," Swiftstrike purred while circling around Leafpaw. "Are you sure about what you said earlier?"

"No, that can't be! The Warrior Code is supposed to protect us, it wouldn't say something like that-"

"And why wouldn't it? You're correct, the code *is* meant to protect us. Outsiders are useless at best and dangerous at worst. We have

perfected our skills and traditions through countless generations. All they do is take advantage of our resources and hard work. Can't you see? They're nothing but a burden!"

"No, no, no, that can't be true!"

"I know it's a lot to take in. That's alright, you're still young and have a lot to learn."

Leafpaw didn't want to admit that Swiftstrike's explanation made sense. Yet, a part of her told her that something was wrong. The warrior code was supposed to guide the Clans. Could it really be enforcing the same dangerous ideals as her worst enemy? She looked at the ground while searching for an answer.

Swiftstrike urged, "We have to act now. These outsiders are a threat and are tainting our Clan. Our Clanmates don't want to admit it, but they all know that they'd rather have these parasites gotten rid of too."

"Act now?"

"Yes, Leafpaw. Together, we can restore FrostClan to its former glory. We were stronger without this dead weight on our shoulders. So, what do you say? Will you continue to defend a Clan of heretics or will you fix what has been broken?" A grin was seen on Swiftstrike's face as he said each word.

Leafpaw couldn't help but stare. Conflicting thoughts swirled in her head like an endless river. She desperately wanted to help her Clanmates who aren't Clan-born. However, by doing so, did it make her a traitor to what the Warrior Code stood for?

In a moment of clarity, she decided that no matter what the Warrior Code said, she'd never turn on her own Clanmates like that. They were never a burden, they were just as much a part of the Clan as those who were Clan-born. FrostClan would never be the same without them.

"You'll have to try harder to convince me. I'll never let you hurt my Clan."

Swiftstrike's grin quickly dropped to a sinister grimace. A growl grew in his throat. "What a pity. It seems like you've grown soft as well. Now that I don't have any use for you, you're as good as bear-food."

As fast as lightning, Swiftstrike jumped, aiming at Leafpaw's face. The apprentice dodged quickly, but yowled when she felt him raking at the side of her stomach like thorns piercing though her skin, a stinging sensation surging through her torso.

She had little time to anticipate Swiftstrike's tactics. He toppled over Leafpaw and curbed her to the floor, biting down at her neck as he did so. Leafpaw struggled under his grasp. She hissed and cried instinctively, but it was no use. The tabby's teeth only sunk deeper. With the remaining strength she had, she kicked her opponent in the belly and swiped her claws at his face.

As Swiftstrike regained his balance, Leafpaw's head was aching terribly. She quickly realized her long journey and lack of food had exhausted her. Nonetheless, she didn't back down from the battle. She bared her teeth and crouched into a fighting position, ignoring the fact that she was on the brink of collapse.

In an unexpected move, Swiftstrike striked her eyes. A fiery sensation flooded all her senses. Her vision was reduced to spinning, bright colors, causing her to lose all sense of direction. The only thing she could do was cry in pain as her fresh scars burned.

Aimlessly, she continued to fight, relying on her sense of smell and hearing. Unfortunately, Swiftstrike was a sneaky enemy. Leafpaw had no idea where to attack or, more dangerously, where her attacker was.

She was pinned to the ground again. At this point, Leafpaw was nothing but a helpless bird under the claws of her predator. She couldn't run or defend herself, so she laid limp and hoped to LightClan that she'd be spared. Contrary to what she had wished, sharp fangs dug into her neck. The same fiery sensation returned, only stronger this time. She gasped for air as she felt her airways tighten. Not long after, she lost her consciousness as her head fell to

the ground.

Swiftstrike was satisfied. Without waiting any longer, he dragged the body away from his hiding spot, washed away any blood from his fur, and covered his tracks with fox dung. As with all his murders, he left without a trace.

A/N: I'm glad to announce that this is the final chapter!!! (Well, there's going to be an epilogue after this, but whatever-)

You may be asking "What? That's it?????"

Fortunately there's more to come :0000 i'm planning two more books to this series so stay tuned for that!!

Epilogue

A small group of cats travelled in a line. They all sniffed the air, tracking something down. The moon had just risen, so the cats had to rely on their sense of smell to navigate the darkness.

The dark ginger she-cat at the front stopped walking. She lowered her nose and groaned with a frown, "How much longer must we go? I'm starting to doubt that this foreign scent you found even exists."

"I swear I can still smell it, Vinestar!" a black she-cat with white tipped paws promised.

"All I'm smelling is bear-dung. Are you sure we're not chasing a ghost, Rubblefall?"

"There's scent of FrostClan mingled with the bear-dung. Getting stronger this way," Rubblefall reassured. She continued her trail, ignoring her leader's doubts.

Vinestar rolled her eyes. "I know that your nose is as sensitive as a dog's but this is getting ridiculous. It's almost moon-high and the night air won't do us any good."

"No, no, I'm telling you we're almost there, I can feel it!"

Another cat from the group asked, "How are you so sure it's even FrostClan's scent? Those cats smell like anything for letting anyone waltz into their Clan!"

"Hush, won't you?" Rubblefall lifted her head to sniff the air again. Suddenly, her eyes widened and she darted away between the trees.

"Where do you think you're going?" Vinestar exclaimed.

Only silence answered her. The cats anxiously waited for a response as they tagged behind. After a few moments, Rubblefall ran back and yelled, "Told you there was a cat here!" She swished her tail,

motioning for her Clanmates to follow her.

The patrol was greeted with the sight of a heavily injured she-cat. Her light orange fur had white and brown patches. Dried blood and scars covered her entire body. The cats looked on, horrified.

Vinestar immediately recognized her. 'That's Pebblestar's rat who attacked me at the gathering!'

"Isn't that Leafpaw? What in the name of LightClan happened to her?"

"That's Pebblestar's daughter, isn't it?"

"Oh my, is she okay? What's she doing on WillowClan territory?"

Frantic questions quickly spread among the cats. Rubblefall lowered her head to Leafpaw's chest to see if the apprentice was still alive.

"Hold on, I can hear her breathing!" she mewed.

Vinestar scowled, "She's clearly on the verge of dying. We shouldn't waste our resources on a foreigner. We can't even be certain if she'll manage to survive."

"Come on, Vinestar, if she were your own Clanmate you'd help her, right?"

"But she's not! The Warrior Code states that the actions of a leader is not to be questioned. Don't try to argue with me on this." The other cats whispered in agreement.

"And the warrior code says that taking the life of another cat isn't allowed. Not like there's no hope for her left! By not saving her we're going against the will of LightClan, aren't we?"

Tilting her head upwards, Vinestar gazed at the stars, completely deep in thought. 'What would LightClan ask me to do?' she thought. After pondering for a while, she finally accepted, "Fine! We'll take her back! Rubblefall, since you're so insistent on saving her, you're going to help Sunbright in the medicine den while she heals."

"Ugh, apprentice duties?" Rubblefall complained under her breath. She promptly lifted Leafpaw's limp body with the help of another cat. The whole group traveled back to WillowClan's camp, completely unaware of what took place earlier the same day.

A/N: This book is finally done!!! Thank you so much for all your support!!! I couldn't have made it this far without you all

As mentioned in the notes of the last chapter, I have 2 more books planned for this series. I also forgot to mention that I'm planning a super edition type book for Nightshade so stay tuned for that ;)))

I just updated the book cover too so it looks 100000% better now